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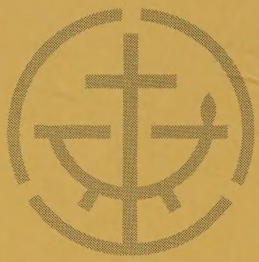

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THE MIND OF CHRIST IN ST. PAUL

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THE MIND OF CHRIST IN ST. PAUL

BY THE REV.
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PREFACE

The discourses which make up this volume are a comparatively small selection from sermons numerous enough to fill many volumes, which, in the course of a long ministry, have been suggested by the character, teaching, and ministry of St. Paul. They indicate, therefore, in part, yet very insufficiently, the measure of my indebtedness to the great Apostle; and the desire to render some feeble acknowledgment of the debt has been one, and by no means the least, of the motives prompting and urging to their publication. It is the fashion in certain circles, and especially in the more critical schools of Christian thought, to speak in dubious and disparaging terms of St. Paul's teaching, and to represent his authority and influence as things of the past. The fashion is not a new and hitherto unheard-of thing; it has often appeared and held its own for a day in the course of Christian history, and always with the same result, that it has not

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shaken the confidence of the Church in the inspiration of St. Paul, but rather confirmed his rightful position as the great interpreter of the Master. Christ is never more the central figure of our faith, never more the supreme object of our reverence and love, than when we sit at St. Paul's feet and learn of him; for, above all preachers, he is the one who hides himself behind the message, and preaches not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord. We forget the earthen vessel as the glory of the divine treasure which it holds shines through. In studying St. Paul we are always reading the mind of Christ, and in hearing his words we never cease to be under the spell of that voice which spake as never man spake.

To think that there is any antagonism, competition, or even comparison between the Master and His servant is both an irreverence and an absurdity. To suggest that we must have less of St. Paul in order to have more of Christ is a gross misunderstanding of the relationship between the two, and of the whole position. St. Paul, at his best, can never be more than a feeble reflector of his Lord, borrowing whatever of luminous beauty his life shows from the majestic splendour of Him

who is the Light of the world. St. Paul's one purpose in life was to exalt the Master, and his writings have invariably served that purpose, except when they have been misconstrued and perverted. Wherever St. Paul has had his due place given him in the Church, Christ has been more fully preached and magnified by the Church; and those who begin by making less of him generally conclude by making somewhat little of Christ.

The cry which in recent years has gone up from thoughtful Christians of every communion, "Back to Christ," is one which all Christian hearts will echo and approve provided that they are allowed to interpret the expression in a way that will not violate some of their most cherished beliefs. If it means that we are to go back from abstruse theologies, metaphysical creeds, and rigid doctrinal systems and schools, to the great simplicities which are in Christ, be it so! We say heartily, Amen! But if it means that we are to set aside the Epistles as of little value, and find our Christ wholly in the four Gospels, or perhaps in three of them; if it means that we are to get behind St. Paul, as if he obstructed the vision, to see the veritable Jesus as He lived and moved among

men and wrought out His mission,—we indignantly demur and protest that the Christian faith would gain nothing, but would lose immensely, by such a destructive process of selection.

The Epistles were the outcome of an inspiration not inferior in degree to that which guided the compilation and composition of the evangelical records, and they are hardly less necessary to the understanding of Christ and the Christian life in their manifold bearings; and St. Paul, though he added nothing to those simple and sublime narratives of our Lord's ministry which have fixed the matchless Figure indelibly in our minds, yet was enabled to take a more comprehensive grasp of the meaning and purpose of it all than was possible to those who were occupied with the lovely and fascinating details of it. Greatness is never truly measured and judged as it passes by. It needs to be viewed from some little distance and in what may be called the after-light. St. Paul had the advantage of this distance and this after-light as well as a peculiar enlightenment given for the special purpose, and the image of Christ as he saw it has a certain magnitude both of height, breadth, and depth which we hardly find elsewhere, save perhaps in the pages of St. John.

St. Paul has given us, above all the other inspired writers, the significance of our Lord's death, the purport and power of our Lord's resurrection, and the mighty, far-reaching after-effects of His ascended life and abiding presence in the Church and the world. To St. Paul we owe an incalculable debt for his application of Christ's teachings to the relationships and business of ordinary life. From him we get the Christian view of marriage and domestic life, of parental and filial obligations, and of the respective duties and claims which are binding on masters and servants. His words fall with illuminating force on some of our greatest modern problems. From him we learn much about the duties of citizenship, and something about the authority and limits of government. We learn still more about the truths which are contained in Individualism and Socialism, and how the two are reconciled. He anticipates all our great modern thoughts about the solidarity of the human race, the fraternity of nations, and the evolution of society and collective humanity into nobler forms; and he has told us all that we know about the Church, its constitution, its purpose, its large place in the mind of Christ, and its glorious destiny. In fact, it is not less of St. Paul

we need, but more, and certainly more of the Paul whom the Master knew. The cry "Back to Christ" might well be followed by another—"Back to St. Paul"; back from the hard and unlovely doctrines which have often been given forth in his name, to the great, broad-minded, tender-hearted teacher who has enriched our Christian ideas and sympathies beyond all computation. With this end in view the present volume has been prepared, and I reverently and humbly lay it at the feet of the Divine One who made St. Paul all he was.

THE AUTHOR.

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PART I

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. PAUL

CHAPTER I

THE GLORY OF THE BLESSED GOD

"The Gospel of the glory of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust."—1 Tim. i. 11.

We read with some hesitation the Revised Version. It robs us of that familiar and much-loved phrase "The glorious Gospel," and we do not let it go without a twinge. We are as conservative with regard to old phrases as we are of old friends, and reluctant to have them touched with the hand of change. Yet here we need not lose a sentiment in gaining a larger truth. It is not less the "glorious Gospel" because it is the "Gospel of the glory," the Gospel which declares the glory, which sets in a living picture, clear and unmistakable, "the glory of the blessed God." It is the same thought which the Apostle gives us elsewhere: "God hath shined in our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," meaning by "face" all that can be seen, known, and understood of Jesus. Supplementing each of these sayings by the other, we get St. Paul's idea of the glory of God and of the message which is committed to our trust.

I. We have a brief, comprehensive definition of the Gospel. It is the unveiling and imaging forth of God in all that constitutes His glory and blessedness. It is making all of Him known that it is possible for human minds to know, and making Him known especially in the face of Jesus. St. Paul thought that God's choicest gift to men was and is a picture of Himself, that the most comforting and inspiring message which can be conveyed to men is that which tells them in full, clear, simple language just what God is, which unburdens their minds of all misconceptions of Him, removes from their eyes the veils of priestcraft and the gross films of superstition, and portrays His dear unseen face in its consummate and undefiled beauty, so that the weary heart will find rest in beholding, and the hands quiver with rapture as they are lifted up in prayer. To know God, *that* is life—life eternal. And to make Him known in the one sufficient way (through Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life), *that is the Gospel.* That includes everything else. There are some, perhaps, who narrow the word down too much, who see nothing in the Gospel but a divine sacrifice for sin. But that is mistaking the centre for the circle, and forgetting that the Cross is a revelation of God as well as an atonement for man. Yet one should speak tenderly of these, and even confess that they are never far from the whole truth—for to all of us, if we have any real part in Christ, His death and sacrifice are the unparalleled fact, the solemnity without fellow, the

mystery which more than all others moves us to wonder, love, and awe. Out of the darkness of Gethsemane and Calvary the glory of the Incarnation rises, and the rainbow of the world's promise. The cross is the sunlight of the Christian system. It illumines and interprets all the rest, and throws its mystic splendour over all the rest.

> All the light of sacred story
> Gathers round its head sublime.

The cross must ever be the dearest part of the Gospel, because it opens out to us the inmost heart of God, and appeals to the deepest need in man; because, in laying our hands on that, we feel most certainly the throbbing of His love and pity, and feel our own throbbings cease. Thus in the largest sense all preaching of the Gospel is a preaching of the cross; for all right thoughts of God have a cross somewhere in the heart of them; all right thoughts of God have the face of a tearful, suffering Christ looking out from the mystery of them. In searching for God, whether in nature, providence, or Scripture, we must go with the cross in our hands for a key. That alone is the "open sesame" which will admit us to the hidden treasure-chambers of the great King.

Yet all this, as you will see, only emphasises St. Paul's great thought that the purpose of the Gospel is to make God known in the largest, widest sense. For everything depends on that.

Our conception of God determines or moulds our views of nearly everything else. All our thoughts of life and duty and of our fellow-men, of the world present and the world to come, grow out of that. If there be no clear light shining down from above the clouds there will be nothing seemly or beautiful under the clouds. What the eye sees when it looks upward is, in the main, what it sees when it looks earthward. The world below is a dim reflection of the God whom faith beholds or fears create. Men are, or tend to become, for the most part what they think heaven is. For each man there must be a new heaven before there can be a new earth, and He who sits upon the throne must make all things new by showing Himself as the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. That is the main purpose of the Gospel, then—to give to all the world right, sweet views of God; to show us ourselves and all human things in the all-interpreting light of His unveiled face; to make us know that omnipotence is Love written large, and that He who rules our lives is one in whom our best desires can find their satisfaction, in whom all our throbbings, searchings, tremblings, and aspirations can have perfect rest. And this thought is enforced by what follows:

II. Our Gospel is the Gospel of the glory; and the glory of God is in the face of Jesus, which means that the face of the Incarnate One portrays for us the beauty of God. His tears are the lenses through which the divine compassions shine; His words are the earthly translation of Heaven's

deepest and sweetest thoughts; His suffering love is the express image of the eternal throne. Looking on the all-round figure of Jesus, from the hour of His mysterious birth to the moment of His triumphant ascension, we are beholding, as in a glass, the very glory of God. There is no word in the New Testament which ought to bring to us more gracious suggestions than this. The *glory* of *God*—alas! there is hardly any other word in the Christian vocabulary which has had such a sad history, which has been so unhappily perverted and misunderstood. O glory of God, what crimes have been committed in thy name! In this name the sword of the persecutor has been drawn, and martyrs' fires kindled, and valiant souls been left to rot in dungeons, and saintly lives tortured on the gibbet and the rack, and earnest seekers after God hunted to madness and to death. With this name the Inquisition sealed all its atrocious orders, and pope, priest, and bigot defended all their infamies. Nay, the very prince of darkness, going forth with this lamp stolen from God's temple and grinning under his masked visage, has turned the world into a hell *ad majorem dei gloriam*—for the greater glory of God. And all this because men went everywhere except to the face of Jesus to find what the glory of God meant. They made it an ugly nightmare, and even a vampire, when it ought to have been a vision of perfect loveliness, a sweetness most ineffable, a thought too deep for tears. It *is that* to us *now* because we see it again where St. Paul saw it—in the face we love best. In that face stripped of all its priestly veils and

wrappings, seen as it once moved among men, with all its pathetic tenderness, its holy indignations, its majestic severities, its consuming zeal against sin, its soul-subduing pities, and its all-embracing love! How beautiful to think that the glory of God is there! Not in His incomprehensible power, but in the gentleness that stoops like a mother; not in the majestic sweep of stars, but in the lowly walk of a patient sufferer; not in the splendour of a throne girt by angel throngs, but in the humiliation of a cross and the mystery of its tears.

We used to read in the old catechisms that the chief end of man was to glorify God, and that God's great purpose in creation and redemption was to glorify Himself. And possibly we thought strange thoughts about that, because we had never been clearly taught, or because we had forgotten what the glory of God meant. When a *man* seeks his own glory as the chief end of life we know what that means. We say that, in greed of power, ambition, and self-love he is forgetting every higher cause and purpose. And perhaps we had an idea, though we did not dare to confess it, that the phrase had the same meaning when applied to the Highest. It seemed to our bewildered minds, though we should have thought it blasphemy to utter the word, that a prodigious selfishness was seated on the eternal throne. But how beautifully is that riddle cleared up when we bring it to the light of these words! The glory of God is in the face of Jesus. He is glorifying Himself when He is manifesting Himself, when He is coming out of

the darkness of His immensity to let men see Him as an incarnate Sufferer; when He is sharing in the griefs of men that He may purge them from their sins; when He is lighting up the gloomy places of life with His smile, and pouring into dreary and desolate hearts His joy. He is glorifying Himself when He brings His own purity and blessedness and offers them to His children. It is God's magnificent, unmeasured giving of Himself that constitutes His glory. And when all His outcast and ignorant children have been gathered to Him, and He has wiped the tears from their eyes, and sorrow and sin are done away, or when at least every one of them shall have had a long, sweet, fair chance of knowing and loving Him, then will His glory be complete.

And so *we can understand what the Saviour meant* when, through all the tearful agony of the closing scenes, He cried, and again cried, "Father, glorify Thy name." It was just a prayer that the Father would open His heart of love to the gaze of men, and convince them, even by a cross, how pitiful and beautiful He was. And we can understand also why it is for ever set before us as the great end of life that we are to glorify God. For what is that but to reveal God to men? to reveal Him by our own pure, Christlike lives? to bear witness of Him? to draw virtue from Him, that we may touch and heal our fellows? It is to show men the Father, to lead them to His tear-besprinkled throne, placing their poor blind souls in His light, laying their parched lips under the droppings of His

mercy, their leprous skins within the reach of His healing touch, and to make them feel, as we feel ourselves, that all Heaven is steeped in tenderness, and all life flushed with beauty, because a loving Father's face beams through all. Yes, that word to "glorify" God should be the most inspiring of words, for it comes to lighten woes here, there, and everywhere; to lift the shrouds and darkness from the sad, guilty faces of men; to mark the earth with the tread of saintly feet, and paint the sky with golden lines of hope, and to make the world know what the greater part of it has never yet dreamt of—that God is love, that His throne is encircled by a rainbow of mercy, tender enough for a child to lean upon, and that "the glory of God is in the face of Jesus Christ."

III. Our Gospel is the revelation of "the blessed God"—yes, if you like to express it in a more familiar term, of "the happy God"; though "blessed" is a far deeper and richer word, hinting at ecstasies and satisfaction such as happiness can never know—such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard. This word has a somewhat strange origin—"the blessed God." St. Paul, I think, was quoting it from pagan lips. The heathen writers, and especially the poets of the Epicurean school, spoke habitually of "the blessed gods"; they used the words, perhaps, with a touch of scorn. The gods were blessed because they cared not for mortals, and had no part in the changes, toils, and sorrows of this struggling world below. They reclined in golden ease, sipping their nectar, quite heedless of mankind.

The gods who haunt the lucid interspace of world and world,
Where never creeps a cloud or moves a wind,
Nor ever falls the least white star of snow,
Nor ever lowest roll of thunder moans,
Nor sound of human sorrow mounts to mar their everlasting calm.

In that sense the sad, pessimistic heathen world understood the *blessed gods*—yes, and that speaks volumes of moral meaning. It was their notion of human happiness likewise. For what we deem the joy of God is ever the ideal human joy. As a man pictures heaven, so he tends to fashion his own life. The gods were happy because they had no pains and burdens of their own, and cared not for the wants and wails of the world beneath them. So man would be happy if he could fill his own cup to the brim, and, in drinking, forget the shames and wounds and miseries of the unnumbered multitude around. Christ has revolutionised all that, swept it away in a flood of human pity. The hand of the Man of Sorrows smote upon that chord of inhuman selfishness, and, trembling, it passed in music out of sight. At least, no man can think in that way any more while he keeps before him even the faintest image and memory of the cross. We still speak of God as "the blessed God," the infinitely happy God; but not happy in that way: only happy in the fulness of His sympathy with men and His perfect love of men; only happy because He takes part, in the way that Christ has shown, in all their sorrows, burdens, and hopes. In the very heart of God's

happiness there is a cross; in the midst of His calm throne the form of One who has carried blood-drops all the days of old. Christ has taught us that the deepest and purest joy comes throbbing and thrilling along the very chords of pain; that it is a pearl set in blood-red jasper, and that heaven's finest rapture is a circlet of glory girdling a sea of patient sympathy and all-enduring hopes. The highest blessedness has always some suffering love and sympathetic pain. The notion that men can be blessed simply by having their own sins forgiven, their souls saved, and their heaven secure is the old Epicureanism with a Christian wash. We may feast upon a banquet which is all our own, and find a sort of delicious satisfaction in it, but there is none of the joy of God in that. Only when we feel, deep down in the midst of our burning gratitude and gladness, thrills of pain and pity for the world which has no part in the feast, do we touch the blessedness of God; that comes only in the way of intense and urgent sympathy, of sorrow for the great, guilty multitude, and self-forgetting efforts to pass on to them our own joy. God is blessed, not because He forgets men's griefs and has no part in them, but because He feels them all, because the Christ heart in Him enters into them all, because He is ever working to overcome them all, because His government of the world is one long travail which He endures for the joy that is set before Him. He is blessed because He knows that all things are moving on to one far-off, golden event, and that His mighty saving

purpose cannot fail. And blessedness can only come to us as it is in Him. It cannot come except to those who have the spirit of the cross, who are co-workers with God and His Christ in the great mystery of pain and redemption, who fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ in labouring for the world and bringing it to His light and love, and who share with the Almighty Lover of souls in His absolute certainty about the final result. They have found the secret of the Saviour's joy; they are the happy ones.

> O happy if ye labour
> As Jesus did for men:
> O happy if ye hunger
> As Jesus hungered then.

Our Gospel is the revelation of "the blessed God."

IV. And now I have but to remind you again, as St. Paul does here, of that which is at once an unspeakable privilege and an imperative duty. This Gospel is committed to our trust. It is our own, and it is not ours. To make it ours exclusively is to violate the condition on which we hold it. It is a possession which shrivels up and disappears in selfish hands. We only keep it by giving it out freely.

> God doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
> Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
> As if we had them not.

And, indeed, those who really know the Gospel will for ever feel the imperative which it lays

upon them to spread it. To catch but a passing vision of the glory of God is to burn for ever afterwards with zeal to make it known. It becomes as a fire in the bones, so that we are weary with forbearing and cannot stay. For its power on our lives is immeasurable, its joy is all-pervading. It changes everything when we feel that, because this glorious, blessed God is everywhere, there is love everywhere; when we know that above and round about us, in the centre of all mystery and on the throne of all government, behind all that we can see, behind all the forces which drive us along, greater than all visible and invisible power, there is a Heart that suffers with us and for us and is wonderfully and eternally kind. That knowledge is the one thing which makes life worth living, and the one thing also which makes it not death to die. And if the knowledge is to us so precious, so joy-giving, so infinitely healing and restful, what greater privilege can there be, and what more binding obligation, nay, what more heart-stirring and soul-expanding rapture than to help in making this light shine over wider fields and on hearts that are still chained and blind in the darkness of the shadow of death? What sweeter work for hearts that have any sympathy, any fellow-feeling with their brother men, than to hold the lamp up which will show them what they are all ignorantly groping and sighing for—a mighty, loving Friend and Saviour in whom all their throbbing, panting, and weariness will find perfect rest.

This Gospel is indeed committed to our trust—

ours pre-eminently. Some of us read, not long ago, a striking article written by a heathen Japanese on the greatness of England. He spoke about our imperial greatness in a way that would satisfy the most exacting British patriot, then he showed what has given us this greatness. We are debtors for it, he says, to all the world and to all the ages. Our climate and our sea-girt island have helped us, and the mixture of races which make up our national character. The thoughts of all past times have enriched our minds. Greece coloured and shaped our literature, Rome gave us our laws, Hebrew prophets and apostles gave us our Scriptures, and an Eastern Christ our religion and the light in which we walk. "Other men have laboured, and we have entered into their labours." And then this writer pointed out that, according to the immensity of our debt, should be our sense of responsibility, and that we, above all nations, should feel that we have a mission in the world to redeem wrongs, to remove oppressions, to set the captives free, to spread righteousness, and make our light shine forth wherever there is darkness. Some of our scribes poked fun at this concluding lecture. But I am not ashamed to sit at the feet of this Japanese when he speaks such words. For they are such words as God Himself plainly speaks to us through all our history and all our privileges. We are indeed the favoured nation—elect, not for our sakes, not because of works of righteousness which we have done, but by His peculiar love and for a high and solemn purpose. We are

debtors to Greek and barbarian, bond and free. We are debtors to all men, but first and peculiarly to those who form part of our vast empire, to the millions who own our sway and make our greatness, the children who sit in darkness, whom God has committed to us, as to a nursing mother, that we might lead them in the way of light and life. They are waiting for our message; sad and weary because it has not yet come to them. Nay, the dark world everywhere is waiting, panting, groaning for that which we possess. All its cries of pain are like a child's cries for it knows not what. But we do know, because the blessed thing has come to us and quieted our cries.

> The world sits at the feet of Christ,
> Unknowing, blind, and unconsoled.

And, may we add:

> It soon shall touch His garment's fold,
> And feel the Heavenly Alchemist
> Transform its very dust to gold.

CHAPTER II

SOME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL THINGS

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and wellpleasing, which is your reasonable service."—ROM. xii. 1.

WE are still discussing, after nineteen Christian centuries, what are the essential facts and doctrines of our religion; and alas! the various schools—High Church, Low Church, Broad Church, and Free Church—are hopelessly divided on this elementary question. If we could agree about the fundamentals we should be practically agreed about everything; but we diverge at the outset, and ever get further apart. Now I am not going to debate that question, but I should like to emphasise what a great Apostle thought about it who probably knew the mind of Christ better than any of our modern disputants, whether Low Church or High, and the verse which we have read is a good index to his thoughts. There he tells us in brief what he regarded as essential features of our holy faith; not all of them, but at least three grand cardinal simplicities, which are a thousand times more important than the things commonly wrangled about. The three things are these: the winsome voice of our

religion, the great motive to which it appeals, and the reasonable service which it demands.

I. The winsomeness of its language. "I beseech you"—St. Paul struck the key-note there. It was his favourite word—he loved to play on the gentler notes in presenting Christ to men. His preaching was predominantly persuasive, pleading, and tender—predominantly. It did not leave out the severities. There was the voice of God's wrath in it sometimes, there were visions of the terrors of the Lord and of a judgment throne; but he was always most at home when he assumed the gentleness of a mother. "I beseech you." There is the sweet ring of that appeal in all his Epistles: "I beseech you, by the gentleness of Christ"; "I beseech you by the compassions of Christ"; "We beseech you, as in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God"; "I might be bold to enjoin thee, but for love's sake, I rather beseech thee." We are told that in preaching he lifted up his hand. We can almost see that raised hand. It is never a clenched fist; it is never shaken in the face of a congregation; it is stretched out as if it would lay hold of people and sweetly constrain them. It quivers with emotion, and there is the sound of tears in his voice. "I ceased not," he says, "day and night, for the space of three years, to warn every one of you with tears."

Tears and beseechings were the main weapons which he employed, and therein he interpreted aright the spirit of our religion and the mind of the Master. For, of course, he had learned this magic of beseeching from the Master: he had

believed in very different weapons once. There was a time when he had tried to drive men into orthodoxy by haling them to prison and scourging them in the synagogues; but a vision of the great, patient, conquering Sufferer had taken all that out of him. The ministry of Jesus was steeped in gentleness; it was for the most part winsome and persuasive, very sparing of curses and very lavish of kisses. It was a ministry of soft touches and pleading invitations. There was anger, indeed, at times, more terrible than the forked lightning's flash; there were woes pronounced more awful than the thunders of Sinai; but it was the very rarity of these judgment words that made them more significant and tremendous. He never used them until everything else had been tried in vain. He believed that men would be sooner moved by tears than by terrors. Force would never overcome evil, but love might. It was not by holding men over the pit of hell, but by distilling upon them the dews of mercy, that the hard heart would be melted. Christ wooed men, knelt to them, appealed to them by the love-light in His eyes. His invitations were like a mother's. "Why will ye not come to Me, that ye may have life?" "I want to gather you, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." "Come to Me, all that are tired and heavy-hearted, and I will give you rest." It was all expressed in this word: "I beseech you." Nay, the deepest meaning of the Incarnation is written there: it was God's stooping to beseech men. Christianity is mainly that—mainly, not entirely. It has a sterner side which we are too much

disposed to ignore in our indiscriminate talk about God's good-natured indulgence to all. It has an intense hatred of sin in the heart of it; it has a background of solemn and inevitable judgment overshadowing it. Our modern preaching, too, much forgets that, hides it, or apologises for it, in the desire to make things comfortable all round. Yet it is there, like a black frowning rock behind the clinging vine-tendrils and sweet flowers. That, too, is one of the fundamental things not to be set aside. Let us give it a place in our teaching, though not a large place. But you will prevail more with the beseechings of Christ. If you would save men do not scold and threaten, but woo. Most of you know what wooing means—no compulsion there; but the pleading eyes, the beating heart, the touch of the hand with the sweet, hot fire of love in it, the pathetic earnestness which will not take a "No." As a woman is won, so must the souls of men be won. That is the winsomeness of our religion. "I beseech you, by the mercies of God."

II. And we have in that word "mercies" the great actuating force and persuasive of Christianity. "The mercies of God." Our religion invites and provokes us to obedience and service, to pure and right living, in the name of all that has been done for us, and all that has been forgiven. We are to do the will of God, not for the sake of future reward, or for the escaping of future penalty, but because of the kindness, forbearance, immeasurable pity, and sacrificial love which have been bestowed upon us. "I beseech you *therefore*," says St. Paul.

It is the conclusion of an argument; it is the consequence of certain thrilling antecedents. He has been narrating in the previous chapters that heart-moving story of divine pity and condescension which is summed up in the words Incarnation and Redemption. He has caused to pass before us the whole drama, beginning with human guilt and helplessness, and leading up, through the scenes of Calvary, to the victory over sin and death, to the manifestation of the sons of God and the assurance of life eternal. He has emphasised the cost in divine love and suffering of our new liberty and strength, our joy and boundless hope. And then upon the human heart-strings which he has set quivering with emotion and gratitude he plays this touching and subduing note: "I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God." And that is always the most powerful and constraining appeal of our religion. A Christian life is, above all things, the response of impassioned gratitude and obligation to God's sacrificial giving and forgiving.

The emotionless moralist will tell you to do right for right's sake, because goodness is beautiful in itself and brings its own reward. And the stern moralist will advise you to pursue the clean and righteous course because the other way ends in a harvest of shame and sorrow. And, of course, both these voices are heard in the Bible; they are both used by the Christian preacher; but they are low down on the Christian scale, they have little force in the Christian conscience. There is no ring of persuasiveness in them, be-

cause there is no emotion and no fire. We never feel the kindling and the inspiration until we get to the very furnace, the power-producing furnace of the Christian life, and that is the soul-enthralling, love-creating mercies of God in Christ.

You mistake the whole spirit and meaning of Christianity if you do not put that in the foremost place among the fundamental things. We are having presented to us, in a great deal of popular teaching and especially in the columns of the Press, a Christianity which virtually leaves out the Incarnation and the Cross—leaves out, in fact, the furnace and the driving power of it. We are told that the moral teaching of Jesus, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, are the all-essential and sufficient things; that they are Christianity in fact. I deny it, with all possible vehemence. The Sermon on the Mount is not Christianity. It is only the moral ideal of the Christian life, and, though beautiful beyond compare, of little worth without some grand spiritual dynamic behind it. It is perfect as a marble statue is perfect. It only wants the hot breath and pulsing heart of life and force. The Sermon on the Mount tells men what they ought to be, and leaves them what they are. It is unworkable, unattainable, and indeed impossible until you get the dynamic of the Incarnation and the Cross into it. It is the mercies of God that supply the moving principle; it is the condescension of the incarnate God, the tears and blood-drops of the redeeming God, that make men ashamed of wrong-doing and set them striving after the

highest. And you have never got to the heart of our religion, you have never touched more than its garment's fold, until you begin to say to yourselves and others: "I beseech you, by Christ's humbling in the Incarnation, by the loneliness and forsakenness by which He offered His perfect offering, by His priestly sacrifice and the bitterness and bleeding anguish of His cross, and by the Resurrection which opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers."

Whatever other fundamentals there are, the greatest of them is here: "I beseech you, by the mercies of God."

III. And out of this come the nature and quality of the service which our religion demands of us. We are to give a "reasonable" service, a service which is the logical outcome of so much mercy and so much kindness. We are to offer a willing and a living sacrifice. There is a sharp contrast suggested between the old Mosaic sacrifices and the new and better sacrifices which the regenerate soul lays at the Master's feet. In the one oxen and sheep were dragged and driven unwilling to the altar, and there slaughtered and presented as dead things. In the other there is the offering, not of a dead, unfeeling thing, but of a whole life, with all its affections and energies, doing the will of the Lord with the prompt obedience of love, and quivering in every nerve with the spirit of joy and willinghood. The mercies of God call for that one kind of service, and no other. It is the only service which could on any pretence be called reasonable. There has

been so much willingness in the mercies that there must be willinghood in the poor return we make. Love must be answered by love, for any other answer only wounds it; any other answer is an insult. If God were some high and mighty autocrat, driving us by whip and stern law to do His bidding, it would be a reasonable service if we reluctantly and groaningly carried out the bare letter of His commands, gave Him slavish worship, avoided only the things peremptorily forbidden, and did as little of His will and as much of our own as the hard necessity of the case allowed. That would be reasonable service, if our God were an unreasonable despot. Then we might wear the chains through compulsion, but we could hardly be expected to fondle and kiss the chains and wear them with joy gleaming in the eyes and dancing in the heart. But the reasonable service which God's loving-kindness deserves is that of the heart brimming over with joy, and leaping, with love's swift feet, to obey Him. Do you think He can be ever pleased with empty forms, elaborate ritual, ceremonial postures and bowings, recital of creeds by heartless lips, sacraments substituted for loving faith, prayers run through as if they were a penance, choral performances without a throb of devotion in them? Are they reasonable service? They are illogical, insulting, a mockery and an offence. Our tender-hearted God must weary of them all. The reasonable answer to the Cross and its redeeming pity is to lay our entire being, with its wealth of affections, at God's feet, and to obey and adore

Him with a sweetness most ineffable. The sanctuary hour should be all gladness and the outgoing of love. But the worship of the sanctuary is but a small item of the living service which we owe.

We call sanctuary worship and church parade *Divine Service*, by a strange misapplication of terms. I know not by what right we call that service. It is unspeakably beautiful; it is immeasurably helpful; it is absolutely essential for the healthy maintenance of the Christian life. I have not a particle of respect either for the intelligence or sincerity of the thoughtless and silly people who fling their cheap scorn at the sanctuary and its sublime exercises, and who tell you that you could better serve God in fifty ways than by psalm-singing and praying. This is one of the stupid half-truths taken up by shallow minds and echoed by parrot lips until they become loathsome and the blackest of lies. Of course, psalm-singing is not serving God—it is telling out your joy in Him; and prayer is not serving God—it is begging something of Him; but without the psalm-singing and prayer and the rest the Christian life would droop and perish and all its larger services disappear. The sanctuary hour is *not* divine service; but it is the preparation for, and the inspiration of, all right and reasonable service of God. From that the Christian soul gets the steadfast purpose and white heat of devotion needed for its work in the world. But the real service of God is done not there and then, but everywhere and always.

If you only feel the inestimable value of Christ's

redemption and the magnitude of the mercy that has saved you, your whole life will be baptized and fired with the spirit of glad obedience, with righteousness, purity, and love, and you will endeavour to serve the Lord in everything, and so offer to Him that reasonable offering—a living sacrifice.

CHAPTER III

THE GREAT PURPOSE OF THE INCARNATION

"It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."—1 Tim. i. 15.

This word takes us back to the alphabet of Christian truth. It is a lesson for the infant class; it is the rudimentary truth which we heard from our mother's lips. But we have not got beyond it yet. We are always going back to this truth, because, the longer we live, the more we feel the need of it. If we needed it when we were children we shall need it even more when we are dying of old age, and I trust we shall be found clinging to it then, as St. Paul did. He was a comparatively old man when he wrote this, and when a really good man is getting old he gets back to the elementary simplicities. A young preacher is naturally ambitious to be original; he talks an academic language, he soars into the cloudy regions of philosophy, and probably takes up with novelties in doctrine. An old preacher has got beyond philosophy to the simplicity which is in Christ, and he talks a language which a child can under-

stand. Further, when a good man is nearing the end as St. Paul was, he becomes humbler, and takes a lowlier place at God's feet. He is more sensible of the mistakes, failures, and general unworthiness of his life. He is not inclined to boast then of anything except the cross of Jesus Christ. He wants just to fall, with a cry for pity and forgiveness, into the tender, outstretched arms of the Saviour. That is precisely how St. Paul felt and spoke here; he sums up the whole philosophy of religion in this faithful saying, as if he thought that the man who has a grip of that holds all he needs for life's conflicts and death's sharp agony: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; and then he adds the words which sound strange to us from the lips of such a man—a man who had been as much a saint as ever God makes in this world—"to save sinners, of whom *I am chief*." It was no mere rhetorical flourish or affected humility. He felt it. He had fallen so far short of his calling in Christ Jesus, he had received so much light and been favoured with so much grace, that no man, he felt, needed God's covering and atoning mercy more than he; and when we get up to the highest Christian life that is possible in these earthly tabernacles, we shall feel that we are just down there with Paul; not setting ourselves up as only a little less divine than Christ, but saying, "He came to save sinners, of whom I am chief."

Now let us for a moment stoop that we may ascend; let us get down from our learned and lofty thoughts and try to look with clear,

simple eyes at the sweetest, grandest thought of all.

I. "He came to save sinners." There is no circumlocution about that, and no possibility of mistaking it. That was the object of His coming, the straight, urgent purpose which He ever kept in view, and the one great work which He undertook to do. Of course, we may be told that this was only St. Paul's opinion. But the weight of St. Paul's opinion has been rightly weighed and judged by the consciousness and consent of universal Christendom, which has pronounced this man the most richly inspired of God's servants, and the greatest interpreter of Christian truth next to the Master Himself. Moreover, the testimony of this man is repeated and confirmed by that of the sacred writers in the New Testament generally. We have it in St. Matthew, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins"; in St. John, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world"; in St. Peter, "He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree"; in the writer to the Hebrews, "Once in the end of the age hath He appeared, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself."

St. Paul knew what he was talking about, and he summed up the incarnation and ministry of Jesus in this sentence, "He came to save sinners." If we do not read the mind and purpose of Christ with this key in our hand we shall read it wrongly, superficially, and upside down; we shall never get into its deeper places, but be only walking in the outside chambers. He came to reveal sin, to

condemn it, to emphasise God's eternal hatred of it, to make it hideous and loathsome in His all-revealing light; He came to bring deliverance from it, and forgiveness by offering a propitiation, and Himself bearing the curse of it. He came to fight against sin and subdue it, and ransom those who had been held fast in its deadly bondage.

For this end was He born—for this He died, and for this consummation He employs His risen and exalted power for ever. It is the Alpha and Omega of the Gospel message, and, whatever else Jesus was and did, we must begin and end there if we would understand the rest.

It is true enough that He often explained the purpose of His coming in other words, but they always pointed to the same thing. He had come, He said, to show the Father and to do the Father's will. He had come to be the Light of the world and to give men life more abundantly. He had come to be the servant of all, and to set men an example that they should follow His steps. He had come to give deliverance to the captives, and to heal the bruised and broken heart. He had fifty gracious, merciful, saving ends in view, but they were all included in the one supreme purpose to save sinners from their sins, to scatter the darkness and heal the blindness which sin had made, to remove the alienation from God which sin had produced, to heal the hatreds, enmities, and moral diseases which were the offspring of sin, to redeem men from the sorrows, heart-burnings, and fears which sin brought, and to shed abroad in all hearts the love which sin kills. Man has only

one enemy in Christ's thought, though he often thinks he has a legion. Sin is the enemy, and Christ's long warfare in living and dying was against that. "He came into the world to save sinners."

We are having a Christ presented to us now in many quarters who had very little to do with sin and the saving of sinners. It is never the real Christ. It is only a fragment of Him, or a fiction, or a caricature, and it generally comes from those who think that the last and least thing they need to be saved from is their sins. Christ was a great social reformer, say some; He came to redress social wrongs and level up social inequalities, to be the champion of the poor against the rich, and of the labouring man against the privileged classes. It is an utterly one-sided, prejudiced, and therefore false view. He came not to be the mouthpiece and defender of one class, but to be champion of man against the devil and his own evil lusts. He came not to set class against class, but to bring them together by destroying their hatred and selfishness. He came to save rich men and poor men equally from their hard, covetous, greedy, and defiled hearts. He came to reform society, not by sweeping laws and new political systems, but by purging and recreating each individual member of society. In fact, He came to save sinners.

And there are some who tell us that Christ was the great Teacher, the sublime Moralist, who embodied His morals in a life and furnished a perfect pattern of conduct: the Man who said loveliest things and did them. And of course He was all

that. Never man spake or lived as this Man. But if that were all, Jesus would be no more than any other great world-teacher has been: a thrilling voice, a sweet, pure song, a teller of divine romances, and nothing more. There is no salvation in the Sermon on the Mount, beautiful as it is. What good are these pearls to the sinner who is black with guilt and hungering for mercy and cleansing? Do you think I would send missionaries to the heathen world if they had nothing to take but the moral teaching of Jesus? It is not fine teaching that men need, but the power to embody it in a life; not lofty ideals, but strength to climb to them, and pity and forgiveness when they fail; not visions of holiness, but a Cross that will save them from despair when they see their own vileness; not pictures of what they ought to be, but cleansing from what they are. They need something that will meet and answer the cry, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" *That is the need.* To get rid of the load of sin, release from the memories and legacy of a guilty past, and power to surmount and to overcome the miserable weakness of our own nature; and that is the deliverance and help which Jesus gives. He came to save sinners.

Our theologies and schemes of social reform are all wrong, whatever we call them, if we do not start with the awful fact of sin, as the Bible always does. If you make little or make light of sin; if you cover it with a thin whitewash; if you fancy that God regards it leniently, that it can be carelessly repented of, easily smoothed over, and lightly

forgiven; that it needs no atonement and no cross; if, instead of telling men they are sinners, you flatter them with the notion that they are half divine,—then you do not understand the needs of men, and still less do you understand Christ. Your Christ is only a philosophical fiction, or an attractive figure in a picture-gallery. The real Christ is not there. You misread the sighs of the real Christ, His groans, His prayers, His burden-bearing, His wrestling in the garden, His baptism of blood. The clue to all that mystery is in the fact that He felt the sin of the world, and the anguish of it, and the curse and shame of it, and He took it upon Himself to save sinners. A Gospel which barely recognises the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the urgent need for cleansing and *re-creation* which sin creates, has no message for the average man, or for the man in the slums, or for the heathen world, or for any of us, indeed. Are we not all morally close akin? We can see a heathen man or the worst of sinners any day with the help of a looking-glass and a little imagination. And a Gospel which deals lightly with sin always deals unworthily with Christ, belittling Him. If we properly believe in sin we must have a mighty Christ, a sinless, divine Christ, even the Christ of Calvary, the Christ "who came to save sinners."

II. Further, He not only came to do it, but with absolute confidence in His power to do it. He knew that He could save sinners—every class and race of sinners, the worst of them and the best. "He saved me," says St. Paul, "the man who hated His name, slaughtered His saints, played

havoc with His Churches—the proud, cruel Pharisee; the stern, uncompromising bigot; the obstinate, iron-hearted rebel. And when He undertook to save me He must have known that He could save anyone." Jesus despaired of none. There was a cheery optimism in all His talk about this matter. There was never the language of one who was going on a forlorn hope. He had faith in men because He had faith in His own subduing, cleansing, saving might. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." It was impossible to cast anyone out until he was beyond recovery, and Christ never saw that word written on any face. He knew that if men came to Him it was just a flickering spark of divinity in them that lighted their way to His feet. It was a tremulous, spiritual longing, a feeble sense of moral need or hunger for God. And He knew that where there was that much—just the faintest taper-light or mustard-seed of faith—there was the possibility of more. Christ's belief in men, in sin-fallen men, was the finest feature of His humanity and the grandest proof of His divinity. It is weak, erring man who despises and despairs of His weaker brother. The sinless heart of Almighty Love despises and despairs of none. Christ never once shook His head as doctors do, and said, "This is a hopeless case—too far gone." The worst moral leper seemed to Him to have a clean spot somewhere. The deadest man had a bit of divine life left. There was at least in the very lowest a place where the lever of divine grace could find a fulcrum and raise the corrupt mass slowly Godward. Christ never despairs of

men now, and His true Church never despairs of men, whatsoever they be. Morality and philosophy despair of certain classes. Philanthropists, educationalists, magistrates, judges, social reformers, are often disposed to write over the most disreputable and criminal class what Dante saw written on the gates of Inferno, "Let him abandon hope who enters here." Ethnologists pronounce certain savage heathen races unredeemable and unimprovable.

But men who are throbbing and burning with the Spirit of Christ have an unlimited belief in the salvability of every human creature, though he be black as pitch and depraved as hell. To lose that belief is to lose faith in Christ and faith in ourselves. For really, if I thought there were one man upon the earth quite beyond Christ's saving, so dead in sin that Christ's power could not stir the least motion of life, I should despair of myself. If Christ cannot save that man I am not sure that He can save me. But He claimed all power in heaven and earth. No men are outside the scope of His healing forces, and that is the inspiration of all our missionary work. "He came into the world to save sinners."

III. Let us, in a final word, remind ourselves of what we sometimes a little forget—that this is a Gospel for all of us, for the most worthy people, reverent church-goers and half-made saints, and for the benighted heathen abroad, and the almost equally degraded heathen at home.

St. Paul says it is worthy of *all* acceptation, of *acceptation by everyone*, and he begins by expressly and emphatically applying it to himself.

Yes, we are among the sinners whom Jesus came to save, and we never get out of that class until we are raised to be with Christ in glory. Some people often ask the preacher, "Why do you not preach more to sinners?" and the answer is, he never does anything else. He is always preaching, first to the sinner in the pulpit, and then to the other sinners. And if you do not belong to that class, I cannot imagine what message he is to deliver to you. So far as I know, there is no Gospel in the New Testament for perfect people. No provision of that kind was made, because the Lord knew it would never be needed. The moment you are no longer a sinner you may shut your Bible, for there is nothing in it that bears on your case, and you may even dispense with Jesus, for there is little more He can do for you.

Of course there are differences, vital differences. There are souls that have been regenerated and touched with the glory of the Son of God; and others still in the mire, all unclean, held in the grip of Satan, and content to be there. But we are alike in this, that we stand as much in need as we ever did of Christ's purging, cleansing, redeeming power, and of His unwearying forgiveness and inexhaustible Atonement. There are hard and selfish thoughts left, and a great deal that is carnal, and very little of that love and pity which made Jesus the Saviour of men. Some of us have been Christians forty or fifty years, and yet we feel still that our proper place would be with the publican, crying, "God be merciful to

me, a sinner." And it is only that feeling which will make us urgent to save other sinners. St. Paul tells us here how he became a missionary, and whence he got the saving fire that burned in him. "For this cause I obtained mercy—though chief of sinners—that in me and through me Jesus might show forth all His longsuffering to others." And the thought of Christ's longsuffering with us, the thought of the mercy which every day covers our unworthiness, the thought of the immeasurable love which is heaping up to mountain-height our final indebtedness to Him, will make us zealous, as St. Paul was, to give Christ to all men, and to make the world know that He came to save sinners.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERTY WHICH CHRIST GIVES

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."—2 Cor. iii. 17.

You can almost hear a change in the tone of St. Paul's voice when he comes to this part of his letter. You can see his eyes glisten with a new light as he talks of liberty. He has been discoursing, so far, on that old system of religion in which he was brought up. There was no great freedom in that for anyone, not even for Moses or the high priest. It was full of restrictions, limitations, and prohibitions. Thou shalt do this, and thou shalt not do that. St. Paul had been a very devout, painstaking, and rigid adherent of that system. He had kept most scrupulously every detail of the law, its sacrifices and ceremonies, its Sabbath observances and tithe-paying. And he had found no joy in it. It had been very wearying to keep the Ten Commandments and the thousand smaller commandments which had been added to them, fastings and long prayers and worship full of routine and drudgery. That was not what any man would do willingly. It was done under compulsion. The law, with its penalties, held its whip over men, and drove them along. They went with chains upon

the feet and with sullen rebellion in the heart. There was no love to lighten the burden and make the way of obedience sweet. It was a house of bondage, in which one never breathed the exhilarating air of liberty. St. Paul had known that, and groaned under it. Now a vision of the larger and nobler Christian life passes before him. It is as when one climbs the northern slopes of the Alps with painful drudgery, through shaded paths in which every view is hidden, and stands at last upon the mountain summit, with all the wealth, brightness, and expansiveness of the Italian landscape at his feet. All that toilsome, weary, joyless work before, and now all this widespread beauty, unclouded vision, and heavenly freedom. St. Paul forgets the past in the glory before him, and sets down his rapture in this one word, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." That, to St. Paul, is the distinguishing feature of the Christian life. A life of service? Yes, undoubtedly, but still more a life of liberty. For he who follows Christ enjoys more of that coveted blessedness than any other man. That is the claim which St. Paul makes. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

I. The soul of man pants for liberty as a hungry child cries for food. It is, indeed, the hunger of the soul. Every age and condition asks for it. The child's conception of manhood is a vision of freedom. He dreams of a time when he will be able to go his own way, and do his own pleasure, with no check or restraint imposed by parents and schoolmasters. Every youth clamours for freedom,

to be his own guide and his own master, to follow his own bent, to employ himself and enjoy himself according to the dictates of his own will, with none to interfere. He asks for liberty to play, or work to do or leave undone, to walk in any path which seems desirable, to think his own thoughts and pursue his own ends, with no chains of authority to hold him back. We are all somewhat impatient of control. We like to drive, not to be driven; to hold the reins, and not bite the bit. The servant wishes he were a master; the soldier wishes he were the general giving orders, and not the private obeying them. We sigh for independence. How sweet that word is to the drudging wage-earner! Independent; with money enough to do without labour; able to snap one's fingers at routine and circumstances; to have life at one's own command, to shape and use it in the line of one's own wishes. We do not like to be dependent on the favour and the good-will, and the permission, and the pay of others. Even the *preacher* often sighs for independence, and wishes he could take his own course and say his own thoughts, without fear of his congregation, or anyone else, except his conscience and God. We all feel the chains more or less. We are under *law*. And nobody loves law; he only submits to it. Necessity drives, compulsion spurs. We go as we are ordered, but we go kicking. We have to do a thousand things which self-love resents, which pride and dignity recoil from. Not what we like, but what we must, is for all of us, more or less, the inevitable lot. And the human heart is always groaning under its limitations and

bondage, and crying for more room, crying for liberty! And here comes the Gospel answer to the cry: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

II. Now I do not suppose that any man will *leap up to embrace that answer* at once. We have to think twice, and many times, before we can understand that the Christian life is a life of liberty. If you look at it from the outside it does not seem to afford or promise any great amount of freedom. You are rather inclined to think that it forges a great many additional chains instead of breaking those which bind us already, and that it imposes new restrictions without sweeping away the old ones. Yes, it would never occur to you to come into the Christian life to gain your liberty. For its first appearance points all the other way. The Christian life puts checks upon you which you did not feel or did not recognise before. It pulls you up at fifty places and in fifty things, and says you shall not go there. It nails its stern prohibition on a hundred of your pleasant desires and self-indulgences. It tells you, with a sterner voice than any parent or schoolmaster ever used, that you must not do this and must do that. It piles up precept upon precept, and order upon order, and new commandments which Moses did not know, and requires you to keep them; and it brings you into the service of a Master who asks for unlimited devotion and unquestioning obedience in all things. Freedom in the Christian life! You smile at the thought. It looks uncommonly like chains, restraints, and bondage. Yet it leads to higher freedom, and the only

perfect freedom which man can have on earth. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

III. Look for a moment at *the Lord Himself*. You get in Him, and from Him, the first and most complete interpretation of these words. You get a vision of noble, beautiful, untrammelled liberty. He came not to do His own will, but the will of His Father. He was under authority, under orders. That was one side of His life. But the other side was one of perfect freedom, for His own will and the Father's will made one music. The Father's good pleasure and His good pleasure were one, and never crossed or clashed. Every step that He took was the step of a free man; every act that He did was done willingly, of His own choice. There was no necessity laid upon Him. He was not compelled to be poor: He elected to be poor. He was not compelled to suffer hunger, hardship, loneliness, man's spite, thankless toil, and tears: He could have escaped all that, but He took it, by deliberate choice, cheerfully. He was not compelled to lay down his life on the cross: He was master of death, and could have turned it aside. Of His own will He let men slay Him with cruel hands, not because He must, but because He freely gave Himself. The whole charm of that life was its willinghood. The glory of it was its freedom. He walked and worked, and taught and healed and suffered, just as His own glad, great, loving Spirit led Him. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

And that is the *liberty of the Christian life*, where the Christian life is lived in the Spirit; that is,

lived with some of the mind of Christ. Of course, there is no freedom in the practice of religious things without that—no great sense of liberty in going to church and repeating creeds and joining in prayers and avoiding certain forbidden things if you are simply doing it to escape a penalty and secure a final reward. It is all a yoke, grievous to be borne, then. It is only when the Spirit of the Lord is in a man that there is liberty. You want *His mind*, and then you do all things, the highest things and the lowest things, as He did them, willingly. Then your feet do not *drag*, they leap along the way of new commandments. The Spirit of the Lord is a Spirit of love, and where love is it often makes hardest service perfect freedom. Nobody is a more complete slave than a woman nursing her own ailing child or her sick and dying husband. She obeys every look, she dances attendance to every whim. She has not a moment to call her own. She is bound hand and foot. She denies herself every pleasure, and even sleep. It is all like the bearing of a cross. And yet love makes it all liberty; she does it freely, without a murmur. It is of her own sweet choice.

A young man is a bit of a slave, and more than a *bit* of a slave, when he is wooing the object of his first and true affection. That gentle seraph is often a hard mistress. She binds him fast with silken chains, soft but very powerful. She orders him about, and makes him fetch and carry for her, and makes him bend his own will to hers. It is slavery, but it is delicious slavery. He never feels the chains. He obeys through choice; he

is glad to obey. Love changes the bondage into perfect liberty. And where love enters and takes possession of the Christian life it brings the liberty.

IV. There is freedom in thought and freedom in conduct where the mind, or Spirit, of the Lord is. Freedom of thought. There are people who use that word "free-thought" with a very different meaning. They claim to be free-thinkers because they have renounced the Christian creed, shaken off the fetters of orthodoxy, and renounced the authority of the Bible. *Now*, they say, their thoughts and beliefs are perfectly independent, and can move without trammels. I do not think there is a great amount of that *independence*. I fancy that most of these people do very little thinking for themselves. They borrow their thoughts. They throw off the old authorities and meekly subject themselves to the *new*. But they tell us that we have no freedom of thought. We believe things because we are ordered to believe them, and because we think it will fare ill with us hereafter if we refuse to believe. And we answer, "*That* is a slander against the Christian life, and a lying utterance against Christian men." If we have the mind of Christ we believe the Bible, we believe the words of Christ, we believe in His divinity and in His cross because their inspiration and beauty and truthfulness and power commend themselves to our intelligence, lay hold of our deepest sympathies, and appeal to all that is best in us. If we have the mind of Christ we should believe them just the same if there were no heaven or

hell in the question, believe them because our whole nature says they are true. We choose to believe them, with perfect freedom in our choice. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there comes, not bondage of mind, but glad, glorious liberty, freedom of thought and freedom of conduct. For in proportion as we have the mind of Christ we do all right and noble things, and we shun all base and degrading things, of our own free and deliberate choice. At first it is hard to deny ourselves the forbidden things, to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, hard to resist and overcome the temptations and drawings towards lower things. We often want to let ourselves go a little. The old desires are strong; we have to hold ourselves back with the curb and restraints of prayer. But that is because the old elements are still powerful in us, and the mind of Christ in us still *new* and *undeveloped*. But in time we get more of the Spirit of the Lord. And then there is less drawing towards the evil things, and more drawing towards the nobler, higher, and Christ-like things. We begin to dislike and revolt from the base, impure, vulgar, and selfish; we learn to loathe them, and turn from them with disgust. Of our own choice, under no compulsion at all, we take to the things that are just and lovely and of good report. They fasten on us by their beauty; we approve them and love them. We could not do the other things if we would, and we would not if we could. Our taste for them is gone, our choice has been given to the things which Christ loved. We *prefer* to follow the good way—with

all our hearts we prefer it. Love makes the choice easy. Love makes the face of duty beautiful. Love makes it sweet to keep up with Christ. Love makes the service of goodness freedom.

That is the story of Christian life, as St. Paul read it, and as we all come to read it when we understand its fuller meaning. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty"; and there is no liberty like that.

CHAPTER V

THE INSEPARABLE LOVE OF GOD

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—ROM. viii. 38, 39.

WE always think of this chapter as St. Paul's finest composition, and perhaps the most precious legacy which he bequeathed to the Church. It is a noble piece of literary work, full of choice language and deep philosophic thought, and, as a picture of the Christian life and its possessions and hopes, it reaches a sublime elevation which is nowhere else attained except in the lofty sayings of Jesus. And the best of it is kept to the last. The climax and peroration are where they ought to be. They form the grand Hallelujah Chorus which brings the oratorio to a close. The previous chapter is a subdued and somewhat mournful introduction to this higher song. It is keyed to a low pitch. It is a prolonged confession of human weakness, intermixed with moans of pain. It describes a human creature struggling, wrestling, and over-burdened; afraid of himself, afraid of the

forces, within and without, which are holding him in bondage and fighting against him. It finishes with a cry of agony—"Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" The present chapter supplies the answer to the cry. The first word sounds a note of victory, and pitches the glad song which follows. Not a wail, nor a groan, nor a sigh of pain is heard now. The heart has thrown off its load of fear and depression. The spirit rises above its cumbersome body and all its carnal environment. It mounts on wings of faith to the heavenly blue. It moves as a conqueror in the light and joy and eternal love of God. The whole chapter is on the ascending scale of elate gratitude and confident exultation, until the climax is reached in this exclamation of rapturous certainty: "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, . . . nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now the man who could say that, and feel it, had insured his life against all disturbances and alarms. He had fortified himself to meet all unwelcome changes and strokes of misfortune. He had found a source of strength and serenity which could never fail or run short. And if you can say this, if by your presence in the sanctuary you should be helped to say it, nay, if you could go away only half persuaded that it is true, clinging to it as something which you would fain believe, which you long to believe—this would be a happy and fruitful hour. It would be worth more than all the successes and gains of the past

year. It would strengthen you immeasurably for what remains of life's hard battle. St. Paul tells us, in brief, that we are sure of the one thing on which assurance is most needed, and that from this one thing, which is the greatest of all, our fickle, precarious, and unstable lives cannot be separated. He enumerates all the wasting, wearing, dissolving, and destroying forces of the world and human life, and he defies them all. He boldly asserts that nowhere, either in this vale of tears and parting, or in the dark, unknown immensity beyond, will any power be found that can wrench or weaken the hold upon us of that love of God which has been revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

I. First, then, we need to be persuaded that we have each a place and share in the changeless love of God. That is the greatest article of faith, without which all the others amount to little or nothing. You confess in the Creed, "I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth, and I believe in His Son Jesus Christ." And that is all sound and true, but it is a far grander thing if you are able to confess, "I believe that God believes in me, and cares for me, and holds my single life in His heart of love." That is the beginning and end of faith, its Alpha and Omega, its initial step and its highest and hardest attainment. It was our earliest religious lesson. For we all learned from our mother's lips the sweet, simple truth that God loves us, and yet we are never quite convinced of it as we might be, and ought to be. All through life we are fighting to retain it, and sometimes in hours of doubt it

nearly slips away from us. To-day it has become again, as ofttimes before, the very battle-ground of faith. Scientific men are once more challenging it, root and branch. The old antagonism between science and religion, which has slumbered for a while, seems to be awaking into fierce activity again. One book after another has come from the Press, in which this foundation-truth of God's love for man is scornfully attacked and pitilessly demolished. They write down human nature at its lowest figure. They represent man as a somewhat indifferently constructed animal, a short-lived creature made up of senses, nerves, and perishable dust, and worth no more in the sight of God than cheese-mites are to us. And they tell us that it is only egregious vanity and egotism which leads any man to think that God wastes a single thought on him. And sometimes, though our nobler instincts revolt from this terrible pessimism, our despondent hearts incline to it. We ask timorously, "How can God love us, and why should He?" We are so many, and we must be so small in His sight, so insignificant and so worthless; we are so frail and foolish, such a bundle of weaknesses and contradictions; we are often so pitiable and even contemptible in our own eyes, that we are tempted to cry out, "It cannot be that God holds each one precious, and loves each one eternally. It must be all a beautiful dream and delusion." That is what we have to fight against and fight for. It is the revelation of the Bible and of Jesus Christ against all our fears and against all the teachings which let man down

and put him far beneath God's notice. There is only *one truth* in the Bible, for all other truths are summed up in that. There is only one truth in Jesus Christ, for everything else which He taught was implied in that, the truth of which St. Paul bears witness here—that God cares for and loves each one of us and deems us worthy of His love and holds on to us for ever. That is the battle-ground of every man's faith. If he believes that, he believes everything. If he is victor there, he is more than conqueror everywhere. "I am persuaded that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

II. We are to believe in the inseparable, unchangeable, indestructible love of God. That is the one solid fact in our lives which nothing can dissolve, which laughs at destruction and triumphs over death. If we are sure of this, it is the only thing in our mortal existence of which we are quite sure. Everything else we have is but a loan, a temporary possession, a house which we do not hold in permanence or on any fixed lease. We are tenants-at-will, liable to be dislodged at a day's notice, or without any notice at all. To talk to you of the things from which we are constantly being severed would be a dreary and melancholy recital; unprofitable, because it would only depress you; a mere string of platitudes, because you know it so well; and endless, because it would run over the whole range of imaginable things.

Life is made up of the things from which we get separated in the course of years. It is made up of guests which come and go. It is made up of

greetings and farewells, meetings and partings, first kisses and last kisses, treasures and friendships hardly won and easily lost; and at every stage of the journey is a finger-post which speaks of separation. You recognise it when you make your will. All that you have piled up with so much slavish labour and devotion must go then, if it does not go before. The lawyer, with all his technical and elaborate phraseology, is only spelling out the word "separation." It always comes to that. There is no holdfast in life. The pauper and the millionaire are equally destitute when they have passed through that door which waits for all. It is the final and complete separation. Nay, you recognise the same fact whenever you think of old age. It means parting from strength, youthful energy, daring ambitions, pushful purpose, friendships, and old lovers. You prove it all through life by the thoughts, opinions, sentiments, and views which you part from, shake off, and change for other and perhaps wiser thoughts. And you even announce it and anticipate it in that sweetest and most solemn pledge which human lips can speak—the marriage vow. Yes, the very wedding vow contemplates the dread separation, "Until death us do part." You can never look beyond that in human things. These words, separation and parting, are written everywhere save on that rock where the Apostle stood, and where I trust we all stand. They are written everywhere save on that flag which we hold aloft above the transitory world—that banner of God's love which is over us for ever. *There* the words

of everlasting promise are written; there human fickleness and frailty are swallowed up in God's faithfulness and constancy. We may forget and change, but He cannot forget. We may even try to fling Him off, but still He holds on, and no power can wrench us from the grasp of His love. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

III. We are assured that this love is grandly independent of our feelings and moods, changes, frettings, and infidelities. It does not fluctuate with our fluctuations. If it did, we should despair of it some twenty times a day. It does not depend upon the constancy of our love at all. Were His love to grow cold every time our love is frozen, it would long since have been changed to winter. Alas for us were His kisses only offered when we return them! Think how uncertain is the flame of love in us. It burns intensely in the occasional hours of impassioned devotion, and then sinks down into chill, white ashes. We are creatures of moods. We are thermometers, changing suddenly from boiling-point to zero. Hundreds of times, if you were suddenly asked, "Do you love *Him*?" you would be ashamed to say "No" and afraid to say "Yes." We should lose Him altogether if He were affected by our affections. In Him the fire burns on steadily; no coldness in us can quench or cool down the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Nor can our *misdoings turn it away.* It is wonderful how it bears with our infirmities of temper

and our manifold yieldings to other and coarser affections. It is wonderful how it suffers our doubts, denials, thankless murmurings, and ever-repeated follies, failings, and inconsistencies. There are times when we think that God cannot love us, because we find so little to love in ourselves. It seems well-nigh impossible. And so it would be impossible if His love were not as far above the human as heaven is above the earth. Yes, but He loved some of us when we were far worse creatures than we are now, and all of us before we loved Him. That was more impossible, and yet He did it.

His love is proof against all *human unfaithfulness.* We may grieve and wound it, but we cannot kill it or shake it off. No unworthiness of ours can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Still *less can the dark and distressing things of life* come between you and His untiring affection. Sometimes, when the darkness hangs thick around you, and the troubles fall fast and heavy, you feel as if God had departed from you, as if His love which you once believed in had changed to indifference or cruel spite. You say, "He has forgotten and forsaken; the sad and bitter things have parted me from His love." But that is because your poor bewildered minds have lost their judgment for the time being as well as their faith. How can such a thing be? that the highest love should fail you when you need it most, that He, of all others, should turn away from you when your helplessness would most cling to Him? It

is unthinkable. It would make Him less than human, Who is infinitely more, and kinder than the best of human. No, there are no warps and twists, and freaks and fancies, and shady places in His love, though at times there are clouds in your own lives which hide it from you. It is always the same true, strong, unwearying, unconquerable love. And that is your strength. If you are sometimes afraid of losing your hold on Him, He will never let go His grip of you. There is nothing in all the forces of evil outside, nothing in the weakness of our own hearts, nothing in the wear of time, in the throes of death, or in the spaces of eternity, which can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

CHAPTER VI

THE STABILITY OF FAITH

"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."—1 Cor. xv. 58.

We rarely read this chapter at our ordinary services. We keep it for our special occasions. It is associated with the great solemnity of life, with the funeral procession, the tears of mourners, and the last long parting. For eighteen centuries it has been said or chanted by Christian people over their dead. It has become consecrated and devoted to that purpose, and we can hardly think of it in any other connection. And yet St. Paul, in writing it, had another end in view. It was not to furnish a dirge and requiem for the dead, but to confirm the faltering faith of the living. It is very evident, both from this and previous chapters, that there had been much unsettlement of belief among the Corinthian Christians. They had been tossed to and fro like children by every wind of doctrine, and had called in question some of the foundation-truths on which the Church and its hopes are built. The resurrection of Christ had been challenged, and the sacrificial

virtue of His death, the personal immortality of believers, and all rewards beyond the grave. Indeed it was like taking the soul out of Christianity, and leaving but the decaying body. And this chapter is St. Paul's magnificent reassertion of the cardinal truths; of the indispensable, imperishable truths without which our religion is no better than a rope of sand or a castle in the air, without which it is nothing but idle talk, pitiable self-deception, and a fabric of hope as baseless as a dream. He declares, with impassioned emphasis, as well as cogent reasoning, that there cannot be, and must not be, any wavering in the Christian mind concerning the facts that Christ died for our sins and veritably rose again from the dead, and that all who die in faith will rise with Him, clothed with a glorious resurrection-body. He declares that Christ has power to vanquish sin, death, the grave, and every other enemy, and that He will never cease to extend His reign until all enemies are put under Him. Those are the things, he says, which we ought to hold with a grip of iron and sinews of rock, and the conclusion is given in the words which we have read: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Stedfast and unmoveable.—One is almost tempted to ask if these words have any application to present times and conditions. They seem rather to carry us back into a world which we have left far behind, a dull, old-fashioned, antiquated world

in which all things were stationary, and the customs of each generation were handed down to its successor, and men were contented to follow the light which had guided their fathers, jogging on in the old paths, and setting their faces against all innovations and changes. There is little of that left now. The world in which we have our being is perpetually on the move. It is almost in a state of flux. We are treated to a series of dissolving views and transformation scenes. The thoughts and habits of our fathers are thrown off like worn-out clothes, and hardly anything remains unchanged except the solid globe, the everlasting hills, the rolling ocean, and the firmament of sun and stars. We hear a great deal about the unsettlement in religion, and the vague uncertainties through which devout minds are groping for a faith. We are told that there is no longer any fixity in religious beliefs; that cloudy and obscure problems have taken the place of firm assurances; that men are drifting away from the moorings to which they were securely anchored, and that the very Church has been driven from its solid ground to shifting sands. Were this true, which I do not for a moment admit, save as an extravagant exaggeration, it would not be greatly surprising. It would only show that religion is affected by the temper of the times, and is feeling somewhat the spirit of restlessness and change which is heaving, wrestling, shaking, and disturbing all things.

You cannot point to any department or sphere of life in which there is stability of thought, unity of mind, and settled convictions. All questions are in

a state of solution, all opinions are seething in a melting-pot ready to come out with a brand-new face. The air is thick with the sounds of clamour, dissensions, and debate. Old policies, old principles, old watchwords and shibboleths, are being tried in the fire and found wanting. Physical science is more divided than it has been for fifty years. Political parties hang together in fragments, and seem on the point of breaking up; the old lines of separation are getting obliterated, to give place to new parties. Social and ethical questions, labour and fiscal questions, are passing through the furnace, to be heated and smelted into other forms. Everywhere men are groping their way to solid ground, listening distractedly to contending voices, tossing on the horns of dilemmas, and asking, almost desperately, what they shall believe. Religion is bound to be touched and influenced by this deep and widespread unrest. It cannot be insensible to the heavings which are going on all around it, yet I venture to say that its vital faith and root-principles are less disturbed by them than any other region of human thought. People who are incessantly talking about the unsettlement in Christian beliefs forget the greater unsettlement which is everywhere else, and they make incomparably more of Christian divisions and uncertainties than the facts justify. The wish is often father to the thought. They see only what they desire to see. They are men whose own convictions are unsettled, and always have been, and they like to believe that their own minds represent the general mind. They are for the most part men

who stand outside the Church, or hang on the extreme fringe of it. They see only its surface movements, and do not read its deeper heart and steadfast purpose. In fact, the great marching host of Christ's people knows very little about the unsettlement which is everywhere advertised. It is too busy in the Master's work to take heed to every changeful wind that blows, and too calmly confident of its faith to be made nervous by every shout and whisper of alarm. The bulk of real and earnest Christian people are steadfast, if not immovable.

We all move with the movements of the age; we cannot help it. We feel the pulse of the human throng, and throb with it. We move as an oak-tree moves when it grows and expands, and its branches are shaken and pruned by the storm, but the roots remain steadfast and unshaken. The whole Church has moved in the last twenty-five years, just as you have moved. When some of us began our preaching we were regarded as advanced, and perhaps not quite sound. Timid faith was afraid that we were leading into dangerous ways. And now even the timid faith has grown up to where we stood, and possibly, in some cases, left us behind. We all move forward in that way—I trust into clearer light and larger conceptions of God and of the thoughts of Jesus Christ. But there is nothing in the range of modern things which has been so little shaken in its vital beliefs and foundations as Christ's Church and the Christian faith. All the grand certainties which are given in this chapter abide with us. There are

few whole-hearted Christians who cannot say, with St. Paul, "I have kept the faith." There are few who cannot say, with Jesus, "All that thou hast given Me I have kept, save that which had to be lost because untrue." Where everything else has changed, the great Christian beliefs remain steadfast and immovable.

And really it is most desirable, and *even imperative*, that we *should* have a *measure of steadfastness in these things, if we are stirred and shaken in all things else.* The just man lives by his faith, he cannot afford to have it always in a state of transition. He cannot afford to have it always simmering in the melting-pot, and wondering how it will come out at the next stage. I do not think it would make life more comfortable if you had to be continually asking yourself if your wife is still to be believed in, and your children, and your dearest friends. I fancy that a wise man will make up his mind once for all on these matters, and not be perpetually discussing them *de novo*, as if there were always a possibility of getting new light. And I do not think it is any more helpful to be everlastingly going back upon our sweet, strong, religious beliefs, and putting them to new tests and trials, as if they had never been proved at all. Life is not long enough for that business. It is crucifying to have the mind always on tenter-hooks and to have the heart always unsettling itself to make a new settlement. Some people are always proclaiming the glory of uncertainty and the surpassing excellence of doubt. I do not covet that sort of glory, or aspire to that sort

of excellence. I would rather have a bit of solid ground under my feet, and a few things which I can hold fast. It is often hard enough to walk and climb up the rugged rock, but it is much easier than to walk and climb on clouds and vacant space. You hear a certain type of preacher confessing: "I know what I believed last year, I know what I believe now, and it is not the same; but what I shall believe to-morrow I cannot, for the life of me, predict." And he utters that with the tone of one who assumes a superior intelligence. It is the kind of intelligence for which I have no envy, ambition, or desire. A man without settled convictions is no more fit to be a leader and guide to his fellow-men than a firefly or glow-worm twinkling in the darkness. Ships are only deceived by wavering and wandering lights; they read their course by the fixed stars or the fixed illumination on some lighthouse rock. It is not generally supposed that fickleness is strength. It was wisely said by one of old, "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." A man may change his convictions or change his party once or twice in a life-time, and be a strong, true man withal; but he who changes them as he changes his coat, about once every season, is not made of adamant, or seasoned with the true salt of grace.

A man who would do life's work well and help others to do it must fix himself on certain great beliefs and regard them as steadfast and immovable. He cannot waste his energies in perpetual re-examination and retesting and dissecting of

them. He has something better to do than go hopping to and fro between one opinion and another. Let the unstable heart delight itself on that sort of vacillating play. He has nobler work in hand. We ought to make up our minds, once for all, that our lives are in God's keeping and under His constant government; that to do justly and love mercy and walk humbly before Him is the grand rule of life, and the certain way to His reward. We ought to be certain that there is an eternal future, a personal immortality, and a judgment to come which no man can escape. We should be assured that the great Christian verities cannot be shaken, and be determined that, so far as we are concerned, they shall not be shaken; that the Bible, on the whole, is to be trusted as God's revelation and our guide; that Christ is our divine, unerring Master, whose words will abide though all things else dissolve, and that, following Him, we have clear light for the earthly journey and a safe Pilot through the dark unknown beyond.

It is only when these things are lifted above the wrangling and debating-ground of life, and held with glad, unfaltering grip, that a man can face his burdens and duties bravely, and make the best of his life and its energies and aims. As St. Paul says here, it is only where the heart is stedfast and unmoveable that there will be the abounding work of the Lord. The men and women who are doing God's work in the world, all but the most insignificant fraction, are not the men who are shifting with every changeful phase

of thought and confessing mournfully that they have no fixity in their own beliefs. The good work of God is done by those whose faith is steady as a rock amid all the shiftings, and who hardly hear even the rumour of that unsettlement which is talked about but not found in their lives. There must be some measure of joy and peace in believing, or there will neither be abounding hope nor abounding labour. "Wherefore, brethren, be ye stedfast and unmoveable, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

CHAPTER VII

THE NAME WHICH IS ABOVE EVERY NAME

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name."—PHIL. ii. 9.

WE have often been told, and have often repeated it to ourselves, that there is nothing in a name. It is only an arbitrary grouping of letters, a meaningless sound. What you are called is of little consequence, and does not change the fact of what you are. It does not make you a doubter to call you Thomas, or a beloved disciple to call you John. It is not the name which makes the man, but the man that makes the name. So we are informed, with an air of superior wisdom, by the man who is a bundle of facts untouched by sentiment. And we readily admit it, for the sake of peace. Yet there is a sentimental side of things which some of us, thank God, are weak enough to see. A flag is only a piece of coloured bunting, yet for that flag thousands of men have died. Names are only sounds, yet they are among the mightiest forces in the world. They stand for persons; they represent great causes and principles. They bring up, by association, heroic and never-to-

be-forgotten deeds. The letters which compose them are of no weight, but the thoughts which they suggest are well-nigh omnipotent. In the political world names are often more powerful than principles. In social life, morals, literature, and religion they exercise an immeasurable influence. Names have won battles, built up kingdoms, swayed the world, and made history. A name will stir a crowd of people to enthusiasm when all persuasion and eloquence have failed. It will inspire passionate love and provoke frenzied hatred. You can conjure with a name, and work miracles. Men are awed and subdued by names; thrilled, soothed, inspired, fascinated, carried out of themselves, made mightier than themselves, filled with heroism, fired with zeal. For a name they will brave dangers, endure sufferings, and give themselves to death.

Yes, when you sum up the forces which have made the world march and brought humanity to its present stage, you find that names have played a foremost, if not the foremost, part. And something of this was in the Apostle's mind when he wrote these words about "the name which is above every name." Now, if for a moment you carry yourselves back in thought to where St. Paul stood, you will feel that this was—

I. A marvellous, and even astounding prediction, only surpassed by that divine word, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." The man who wrote this was not only the greatest of the Apostles, but the most far-seeing of the prophets. He saw the future with

clear, assured, wide-embracing eyes. At least, he read the grandest lines in that yet unopened scroll. He read the one magnificent secret which the centuries would reveal, but which was then completely hidden from the eyes of the world. It seemed, indeed, the craze of an enthusiast, or even the dream of a deranged mind. He wrote this when the power of Jesus was unknown and unfelt, save by a few obscure handfuls of believers. Not a hundredth part of the human race had ever heard the "Name," and the greater part of these had heard it only to scorn. It was too insignificant to enter into the world's calculation of forces. Those who thought they were making history—the writers, thinkers, statesmen, and soldiers—were either ignorant of its existence or pushed it aside with contempt. And the air was ringing with other great names which seemed likely to endure for ever—Cæsars, senators, poets, philosophers, builders of empire, shapers of thought. Names that were deified, for which temples were built; names which made millions of men tremble or fall down prostrate in slavish adoration. It might have been thought, nay, it was thought, the wildest of all delusions to anticipate for this name of Jesus an exaltation so surpassing, a power outstripping all calculation and imagination, a place in men's hearts and a sway over their minds which would fling the influence and majesty of the Cæsars into absolute littleness and oblivion. "We are fools for Christ's sake," said the man who wrote it. Fools, indeed! We ourselves should have seen lunacy stamped upon it at that time.

And yet *everyone knows now* that the dream has been realised—not completely, not as it will be, but magnificently, beautifully, and in such a way that the greatest effort of mind can hardly take it in. If Jesus does not yet rule the world, His hand is far stronger upon it than the hand of any other. His force is almost greater than the sum of all others; His voice commands more obedience than any other; His name exercises in the world a charm, a magic, an irresistible fascination, which is quite immeasurable and out of all comparison with others. There are many prominent names of distinguished living men which arrest public attention and are often on men's lips, and there are still more illustrious names which figure on the pages of history like shining stars amid the darkness of the past—prophets, apostles, reformers, pioneers of progress, world-movers. But it is mere trifling, nay, it is a very profanation, to put other names alongside His, and weigh against His their moral influence. He overtops them all, as some Alpine mountain looks down upon the dust-heap at its feet. Where His doctrines are least obeyed, His moral supremacy is acknowledged; where His deity is denied, the sublimity of His mind and character is recognised; where men deride His miracles, they bow before His spiritual purity; where the multitude hold aloof from His churches, they have still a consciousness that never man spake and never man lived like this Man.

The place which Jesus holds in the world to-day is beyond all computation. The secret part which He plays in the world's movements, and the power-

ful impress which He puts upon the world's ideals defy all measurement, and it would be as easy to count the sands of the sea-shore as to count the pulses of thought, emotion, and endeavour which come from Him. Never before has He had so many witnesses and messengers engaged in spreading His truth and lifting up His person in the view of men. Never before has he attracted to Himself so much reverential love and kindled so much impassioned devotion. The last century saw and recorded an unexampled expansion of His power. There is now not a known land, continent, or island where His name has not been sounded; not a tribe or race of men which has not yielded to Him its tribute of converts; hardly a language in which the story of His life and death has not been told, and no heathen darkness anywhere in which the light of His Gospel has not shed some scattered beams. And if you say that His professed adherents are still in a small minority compared with the vaster number who have not yet learned to call Him Lord, I answer—yes, in count, but not in power! The Christian nations are becoming more and more the mighty nations of the world, the progressive, ruling nations. Slowly they are bringing all the world under their influence. Their thoughts and sentiments, their moral standards and spiritual ideals, their religious conceptions and beliefs, are moving irresistibly to universal dominance. Not only by the missionary, but by a hundred other strange ways and instruments, some of which Christ would not sanction, is He slowly making His way to the mastery of the world.

Ah! and what His *name is to those who love Him*, nor tongue nor pen can show. There is music in the name. It is sweetness most ineffable. It heals like medicine, and soothes like an anodyne. It allays fevers, disperses fears, and illumines despairs. It imparts vigour and inspires courage, makes suffering patient and death welcome. It brings with it a world of gladness and hope. It transfigures common men, and lo! they are heroes, saints, and martyrs. It is the name we love best. It is the name we heard first from our mother's lips. We hope it will be the last name on our lips ere they are closed in the long silence—the name which God hath highly exalted above every name.

II. In this adorable name, this name lifted above every name, there is the one binding force in the midst of divided humanity; especially the one and only possibility of real union in the Church. Names are mighty both in dividing and uniting men; mightier in uniting them, welding them into one mass, and making their hearts throb together as the beatings of one heart. An army is consolidated by a name. Multitudes clasp hands in brotherhood under the magic of a name. Differences and disputes, class distinctions and envies, intellectual and moral barriers, are swept away like the filmy web by devotion to a name. And this name is above every name. Surely all Christians are feeling this in the sense of unity that is coming to them. It is because the Church has of late been slowly, persistently lifting the name into preeminence, putting it before all schools, systems of thought, creed-makers and creeds, founders of sects

and theologies, because it is feeling again, as in the Apostolic days, the transcendent power of the name, that through all its branches there has come a deep longing, a profound sigh, like the groaning of a new creation, for more oneness. And that which has suggested the urgent desire will bring the realisation. Everything else divides. Creeds divide—the moment you formulate your beliefs you accentuate differences—sacraments divide, orders divide, offices divide, organisations divide, theories of the Church divide, favourite leaders and teachers divide, even Apostles have divided, as at Corinth; the *name only* unites. Get any assembly of Christians together gathered out of all the Churches, and ask them what they think of Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Pusey. Ask them what they think of priests and ministers, of Baptism and Holy Communion, of the Nicene Creed or Westminster Confession, of the Church and its organisations and polity, and who belong to it, of ordination, and liturgies, and ceremonies. Ask these questions, and there will be a tumult of answers as varied and almost as angry as the voices of Bedlam. But name the *name*. Ask them, "What think ye of Christ?" and all lips will be first silent with profound emotion, and then they will break forth into one harmonious, glad confession, "He is the chief among ten thousand and the altogether lovely." We shall be all one indeed when we all realise that—that He is the end of all desire, the crown of all hope, the sum of all faith, the centre and soul of worship, the furnace-fire of love that

kindles love in all, the one adorable Being whose face puts every other face into the shade, whose name is so far above every name of sect and party that to mention them in the same breath is an irreverence. We shall be *one indeed* when the great object of our Christian endeavour is not to preserve and exalt our offices and functions and dignities, not to push our own views and organisations into supreme importance, not even to magnify and multiply and aggrandise our several Churches, but to get His power felt, His will done, His salvation and healing spread, His all-subduing love made manifest. Then shall we strive together as we never have done yet to push His kingdom forward in the world, to carry His light into dark places, and bring all God's guilty, sorrowing children to His redeeming feet. All our mission work, both at home and abroad, will be re-baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire when our hearts and the hearts of all the Churches have in very truth exalted Him over everything else that we believe and hold dear, when we have put His name where God hath raised it—far above every name.

III. In the joy which this name suggests, in the absolute supremacy which we assign to it, and in the unquestioning conviction that it will win universal pre-eminence, there is all the stimulating and inspiring power which the Church needs for its onward march and its warfare against the sin and darkness of the world. Truly, in this name lifted above every name, is the source of all prayerful longing, earnest labour, self-sacrificing zeal, and missionary fervour. St. Paul has told us

in these words the secret of his heroic devotion and sustained energy. He has told us the brief story of all those who with him "went forth for the *name's* sake." To him and to them the name was more than wonderful—it was unutterably dear, a sacrament of mystery and grace. It set his heart beating whenever he heard it. His lips quivered whenever he uttered it. It was written on every fibre of his being, burned as with letters of fire on all his thoughts and emotions. It represented all that he hoped for, all that made life worth living, all possible joy here and beyond the grave. It was so sweet to name it, to sound it in the ears of others, to see eyes gleaming as they heard of it, to spread the savour of it abroad. It commanded him with its mighty imperative; it was like a fire burning in his bones, so that he was weary with forbearing, and could not stay. "Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." Moreover, he and those who laboured with him knew, beyond a doubt, beyond every whisper of fear, that this name would get to itself universal power. "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow." It was the profound conviction embodied in this magnificent assertion that sent those early witnesses forward to their awful, majestic, apparently quixotic, but truly heroic, conflict with the world, which steadied their hearts in failure, and charged them with indomitable purpose, and made them all aglow with anticipated triumph. They were sure that principalities and powers, spiritual wickedness in high places, thrones and dominions, philosophies and superstitions, and

the whole mass of opposing intellectual, moral, and material forces would slowly but inevitably yield to the power of the Cross and the sway of the Name. The whole world would kneel at the feet of Him who died for it. The name was *all in all* to them, and it would become all in all to the world. These two things—the sweetness of the name to them and their assurance of its irresistible power in the world—made them apostles and missionaries, made them fervent, enthusiastic, persistent, undoubting, fearless, self-denying, and gave them their victory over the world.

And we shall share their thoughts, sympathies, and purpose to the full if we have grasped the import of the name as they did. Do you feel its power yourselves? How much does the name mean to you? Is it true, as you often sing—

> Sweeter sounds than music knows
> Charm me in Immanuel's name,
> All her hopes my spirit owes
> To His birth and cross and shame?

Is it true, as you have repeated many a time—

> Nor heart can sing nor tongue can frame,
> Nor can the memory find,
> A sweeter sound than Thy blest name,
> O Saviour of mankind?

Is it dearer to you than all the names of pomp, wealth, ambition, and human distinction? Is it dearer, one hardly dare ask you, yet it ought to be, than mother, wife, or child? Does it suggest to you all that is best in life, and all that you can

bear to think of when this short life is over? Is it a name that you would willingly suffer for? that you would sooner die than deny? Would memory lose its one precious treasure if that were gone? would hope fail and die out like some flickering lamp burned down to its last drop of oil if that name were blotted out, and the world grow suddenly dark and a pang shoot through you as if something were about to break in your heart? If the name is that to you—and it is all that to thousands—then you will wish to say, not in rhetoric but in sober sincerity, not in transient gushes of emotion but with abiding purpose:

> My gracious Master and my God,
> Assist me to proclaim,
> To spread through all the earth abroad
> The honours of Thy name.

And do you believe, as St. Paul declares here, as he and all the Apostles believed—for they would have counted it utmost treachery to their Lord to doubt it—do you believe, as every Christian believes who is worthy of the name, do you believe in your deepest hearts, that this exalted name must have, and will have, universal pre-eminence; that it will not continue to divide the world with other masters, but possess, as it already claims, the whole? Do you believe that every other name will be lowered and swept aside, and forgotten, that this may be all in all? Do you believe that at the name every knee shall bow? And who, that is worthy of the Christian name, abates one jot of that mighty assurance and hope?

Your faith is but the whispered humbleness of a trembling apology if it thinks that other masters and other religions will continue to share with Him possession of the world for which He died. Your allegiance to Him is hardly worth as much as the breath which confesses it if it does not assert His coming right to every human heart and crown Him Lord of all.

If you believe this, you will pray for it, you will speed it on. You will bless God for every sign of its coming. You will have part in that grandest hope and dream of the Church and each Christian heart, when the name shall have brought music to every ear, as it has to yours, and every knee shall bow under the thrall of its subduing force.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THINGS WHICH GOD REVEALS TO THEM THAT LOVE HIM

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."
1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

We often use these words in relation to the life beyond. We quote them as if they referred to the songs of the redeemed, the raptures of glorified spirits, and all those inconceivable visions and joys which belong to the heavenly state. In this sense they are employed in one of our favourite hymns:

> Glories upon glories hath our God prepared,
> By the souls that love Him one day to be shared;
> Eye hath not beheld them, ear hath never heard.

And no doubt the words are quite true with that application. But that was not what the writer of them meant. He was thinking, not of the mysteries of the future, but of things in the present time which are hidden from coarse and unenlightened eyes, and revealed to those whose souls have been touched to finer issues.

St. Paul was answering the contemptuous criticism of those who called his preaching foolish-

ness. The cultured men of Corinth had weighed his message in their intellectual scales and rejected it as worthless. They had found his speech defective in the graces of oratory, and the doctrines which he announced offensive both to reason and good taste. That a crucified Jew should be the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, and the final Judge of all men, seemed to them the delusion of ignorant and crazy minds, not to be entertained for a moment by men of sound judgment and intelligence. And St. Paul replied to them here with pride as great as theirs, though of a loftier kind; and with scorn too, like a keen-edged rapier, though scorn which had a touch of pity in it. He declines to submit the mysteries of God to their handling. He repudiates their tests. These things are not judged by the sight of the eyes and by the hearing of the ear, nor even by the trained and well-balanced intellect. They require for their perception a culture which no schools can give, a culture which comes direct from the Spirit of God to the spirit of man, and which is only bestowed upon them that love Him. In fact, he claims for himself and his fellow-Christians a certain superior insight and receptiveness, an endowment peculiar and unique, an apprehension which others have not of the things which make up the higher and diviner life. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. . . . But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

I. Now this truth has often provoked the wit of the satirist and the sneer of the infidel. They have laughed at the idea that anything could be

revealed to the soul of faith which is not open to the eyes of the intellect. And sometimes, alas! their sneer has been not without provocation, for the truth itself has many times suffered in the hands of those who have abused and perverted it for their own ends. The priest has claimed it to silence the laity; the bigot and the persecutor have employed it to stop inquiry and quench the highest aspirations of men. And often the vulgar and self-confident preacher, talking the grossest absurdities, has denounced those who reasonably objected to his utterances as carnal, unspiritual, and incompetent to judge. It is open to anyone who is perhaps equally devoid of modesty and grace to use this as the cover of his own ignorance and arrogance, and to say, "*We* know these things, and you do not." All this is inevitable. You have read miserable parodies of the loftiest poems, and seen wretched caricatures of the noblest faces. So the sublimest truths may be easily turned into coarseness and buffoonery; but the truths remain great and immortal, in spite of that.

II. There is a spiritual faculty given to men which makes them wiser in the things of the spirit than all which the wisdom of this world knows, and the merest child in faith may feel and know what the intellectual giant has no perception of. There are simple things in every-day life which are close akin to this. You know people who are clever enough in their own department, and yet blind, deaf, unfeeling, and unappreciative concerning the things which are profoundly interesting to you; men who know fifty times more than you know

about the world of books, yet have no more sensitiveness than a stone to the music which sets your heart beating with inexpressible raptures; men who could run up a column of figures whilst you are stumbling over the first of them, and who are no more affected by the most exquisite poetry than your favourite dog might be. There are men to whom the most beautiful painting which the great masters ever executed suggests less thought and less delight than the gilded frame in which it is held; but they would be able to tell you the exact date, quality, and cost of the wine on your table. There are coarse natures, to whom sunsets and flowers and the infinitely varied landscapes of nature are utterly unattractive and meaningless, whilst the banquet which awaits them at the end of the journey is like a vision of heaven itself. As Mrs. Browning writes: "Earth is crammed with heaven, and every bush on fire with God"; and then adds, with a flash of scorn, "But in that bush most people see only blackberries." There are people on whom wit and humour are as much wasted as if you were expending them on a brick wall, and people on whom the finest touches of pathos are lost, just as if you dropped them into some echoless pool.

These differences run all through life. They determine whether a life shall be coarse and empty or refined and abounding with joy. There are perceptions which no training can give, which no schools can create: they are the endowment of nature, or rather the gift of God, and they are often in the possession of the child, or the untutored

woman, and even of the unlearned preacher, whilst the most omnivorous reader and bookworm may be destitute of them.

And if you think of this you may well allow, if you do not understand, that the same truth holds in the life of faith and religious emotion. Take St. Paul as he stands chained before Agrippa, or Festus, or Felix, and flings out, in face of all their splendour, his proud, pathetic challenge, "I would that ye were altogether such as I am, except these bonds"—a saying which, in its very tenderness, expresses the utmost contempt for all that these men enjoyed and were living for. Life meant for these men sensual pleasures, pompous shows, command of money, power and ambition—cups most of which St. Paul had tasted. He knew the quality of them, knew the measure of satisfaction they would yield. And he had stepped up from this to a higher platform, to a life in which vulgar ambitions were forgotten, and the pleasures of the senses pushed out by mightier joys; to a life in which enthusiasm, hope, love, great aims, the friendship of God and fellowship with Christ, were supreme. Standing there, with the chains upon his wrists, despised or pitied by all the spectators, he felt a joyous liberty, a serene calm, a fulness of unutterable emotion, a lofty grandeur of soul, such as he knew that they had never felt and known. He was quite sure that life meant more and deeper and nobler things to him than had ever entered their hearts to conceive. There had been revealed to him the things which "eye had not seen, nor ear heard."

And it is always thus with the souls to whom God has spoken His deeper things. The joy which they have is so refined and pure that they can look down with solemn and pathetic contempt on lower joys. If you do not at times feel something of this, one may well question whether you have any real religious feeling at all. Surely there are hours in your lives when you get above all your ordinary pursuits and strivings, and all the pleasures which you share with worldly men; when you get *above them*, and take the measurement of them from that *higher* platform; when you yourselves feel that you have vastly overrated them, and that the things which are dearest to you, and of infinitely greater importance, are those hopes, emotions, and communions which belong to you as children of God, which are the gift of Christ to you, and which are no more understood by the unbelieving world than the pleasures of the intellect are understood by the man who cannot read or spell. If the best part of your lives is not hidden from the world, then it is to be feared that you have no Christian life at all.

III. It is simply impossible for the secrets of the Christian life to be revealed to those who have no Christian beliefs and sentiments. People say to us: "Your joys are imaginary, your perceptions of God are self-delusions, your assurances, and hopes, and peace of mind, and consciousness of forgiveness, are your own creations; they are things which *we do not feel*, and do not understand, and do not believe." Precisely! It would be a wonderful thing, indeed, if they did understand what they

have never felt. You cannot make a deaf man understand music, though you spend years in instructing him. Nobody but a mother can quite understand what a mother's love for a child is. You might read all the volumes which treat on that affection, and ransack the whole dictionary of love, without being much wiser as to the real mystery of it. The only way to find that out is to become a mother. And the only way to discover the sweets of divine forgiveness is to be forgiven. Plato draws a picture of the worshippers in the old pagan Mysteries. They are going through the sacred dance to the sound of sweet music which is being played in the midst of them. But there are spectators watching them from the hill-side afar off who say these dancers are mad. The spectators can see the movements of joy, but they cannot hear the music. And people outside the Christian life are like these spectators. They cannot hear the music, and all the rest is strange and inexplicable. They do not know the raptures which are felt when the load of sin is removed; when God, who has seemed far off, comes as near as a familiar friend; when life moves in heavenly places, overshadowed by the love of Jesus, and there is a singing in the heart sweeter than all earthly music. They cannot know. They must taste before they can experience the things which God hath revealed to them that love Him.

Nay, you may be Christians in a sense, and yet *have the finer and deeper things of the Christian life hidden from you*, if you have little of that love of which St. Paul here speaks. Suppose your

Christian life is mainly, if not entirely, a regard for matters of worship and morality. You are just walking on the circumference of faith, knowing little of the heart and centre of it. You have a belief in God; you believe in and adore Christ as the great Master of Truth; you respect all His commandments, you recognise all His moral precepts as binding, and you are endeavouring, in a measure, to order your lives in obedience to them. Your religion consists chiefly in doing certain things and avoiding certain other things—living what you call fairly good lives. But there is hardly any emotion in your worship. There is hardly a single pulsation in your hearts of deep, genuine, fervent love of God, or love of Jesus Christ. Well, you may be Christians; I would not, for the world, deny your title to the name. But I will say this, that the greatest things in the Christian faith and religion are entirely hidden from you. The best parts of the Epistles and the sweetest parts of the Gospels are as unintelligible to you as if they were written in their original Greek and Aramaic and had never been translated. And the sermons which touch the higher chords and keys of the Christian life will have no more effect upon you than the breeze has which sweeps over a frozen pool. You will say these sermons are dull, dry, heavy, mystical, and you do not understand them. No, that is the pity of it; and you cannot unless you love God, for it is only love that comprehends the greater things. You never really believe that God loves you until, with your whole heart, you begin to love Him. You may accept

it as a thing that has been often told you, and in an unquestioning, because unthinking, way; but you do not feel it, and get expanded with the joy of it, until your own hearts are alight and alive with some returning flame. God does not give Himself fully save to those whose hearts go out to Him with a sweet and glad affection. It is not Christian morality, but Christian emotion, that brings us in to the deeper things.

It is to those who love that God makes His presence felt. To them He makes known the height and depth and breadth of His own tenderness and everlasting loving-kindness. In their hearts He breathes peace, courage, cheerfulness, and fulness of joy. They alone understand how much of heaven this earthly life can bring. Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, but God reveals them by His Spirit to them that love Him.

CHAPTER IX

ST. PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH

"The house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."—1 Tim. iii. 15.

Our Lord spoke often about the Church, but He never explained what He meant by the word or the institution. He dropped a few hints and drew one or two word-pictures, and that was all. The Apostles followed His example. They were constantly talking about the Church, particularly St. Paul, but they gave no precise definition or description of it. They had evidently no rigid plan of it in mind. It was not a dead thing, shaped and fixed for ever in one mould. It was a living thing, subject to growth, and beautiful with all the diversity of life. It would never conform to one pattern. It would never be tied down and bandaged by ecclesiastical red tape into a stereotyped, uniform respectability. It would be manifold, like the manifold wisdom of God: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The claim which certain people make to impose their particular form of church life upon the whole of Christendom and to treat as schismatics

and outsiders all who do not don the one uniform is not worth discussing in these days. It is a claim which common sense rejects, as well as common charity. And the claim has ceased to be offensive because it has become distinctly absurd. The Church of the New Testament has no cast-iron limitation, and no one channel or chain through which divine grace flows. It wears no uniform except the armour of God and the robes of righteousness, and it is as varied and as wide-embracing as the mind of Jesus.

Yet St. Paul gives us here what is the nearest approach to a definition of the Church which we can find. It is a beautiful little picture, which contains all the essential features of a Church and of church life. And it is, or ought to be, equally true of the Church universal, and of every Christian community which, having Jesus in the midst, rightly takes the name of a Church. It shows us the constitution, and the purpose of a Church according to the divine idea.

I. The Church is an elect assembly, representing for ever the living God. The *ecclesia* of the living God, so St. Paul expresses it. It was Christ's word, though our Lord never coined a new word for a new and divine thing—the new word would not have been understood. He took the name of some human thing or institution which bore a certain resemblance to the new thing, and applied it with a new meaning. *Ecclesia* was the well-known name which the Greeks gave to their council, or parliament, the company of elect men picked out from the multitude to be their repre-

sentative leaders and guides. Our Lord deliberately chose that word to describe the company of believers. He meant that they were to be God's appointed representatives, a moral and spiritual aristocracy bearing ceaseless witness for Him. They were to be men of spiritual light and leading, interpreting God's law, and showing their fellow-men the way to a diviner life. That was Christ's magnificent idea of the Church in its relation to the world. It consists of a body of men and women separated from their fellow-men for the sake of their fellow-men; elevated in thought and life that they may work for the elevation of all. "Ye are the salt of the earth"; "Ye are the light of the world." That is divine election, and it is the only election which the Master of our Faith recognises. We need not be afraid of the word because it has sometimes been used in a narrow and perverted sense. It is Christ's word. It is the root-meaning of the word *ecclesia*: the *élite*, or elect ones, called out by God for a purpose. God always brings the world forward by the method of election. He ennobles the few that they may lift up the many. He gives light and truth, sanctity and goodness, to a select number, that they may share out their gifts to the world at large. The sunlight shines on the mountain-tops before it reaches the valleys below. God, as Shakespeare says, kindles no torch to burn and shine for itself. When He fills a soul with light He makes windows in that soul, so that all the surrounding darkness may see it.

All exceptional gifts are bestowed on this prin-

ciple. They are not for private enjoyment, but for public distribution. Shakespeare and Milton were endowed with genius that the whole world might be enriched by their thoughts.

The artist, poet, prophet, and apostle have visions of truth and beauty that they may be as eyes to the blind. "Art was given for that," writes Browning. "God uses us to help each other, thus lending our minds out." And what is given directly to one is given indirectly to all.

The Church is the embodiment of that great divine thought. It is the steward or trustee of God's truths, not the owner. It receives freely that it may freely give. It is a company of men and women to whom He lends Himself that the world may feel His presence in them and become a little less undivine itself. Let us never forget the old definition of the Church, which has entered, in varied forms, more or less into the creeds of all the Christian communions: "A company of regenerate and faithful men and women realising the presence of Jesus in the worship and sacraments, and obeying the law of God through the Spirit of God who dwells in them."

We always get wrong when we get away from that. The Church, says St. Paul here, is "the house of God"—that is, the house in which God dwells. He is not speaking of a building, but of living souls, the souls of believing, Christ-loving men. God dwells in them pre-eminently and peculiarly. Do not let us be carried away by all the specious and flattering talk which is going on about the Divine Immanence in all men—talk

which virtually sweeps away the distinction between the Church and the world. Of course, there is a grain of truth in that, as there is in every new extravagance. St. Paul recognised that grain of truth: "He is not far from any one of us, for in Him we live and move and have our being." But St. Paul never confounded that with the presence of God in His Church, with the indwelling of the Spirit of God in the hearts and lives of those who love Him. That is a quite unique thing, the great transcendent mystery which is not to be frittered away in the flattering unction which tells every graceless person that the Spirit of God dwells in him as much as in the noblest saint. The Church is the communion of faithful souls devoted to Christ, and bearing their witness by virtue of the Divine Spirit within them. It is not the clergy and ministers, it is not the indiscriminate host of baptized persons, or persons that repeat catechisms and creeds. It is not a heterogeneous association of well-meaning people who are engaged in various good works. It is not the all sorts of people who may be brought under good influences in connection with a sanctuary. Church Institutions, as we call them—and I like that word far better than Institutional Churches, which may be dangerously misleading—Church Institutions may be, and often are, admirable, and needed things in their place, if the Spirit of Christ rules in them. But make no mistake: the mixed people whom they draw to recreation and social intercourse are not the Church. The Church is the foster-mother of the Institution, and we shall

need to be always on guard lest the Institution outgrow and push out the Church; lest the Institution, like an unnatural child, devour its own parent. For the Institution will speedily become corrupt and perish, if it be not controlled by a spiritual Church.

The Church is always one thing: the body of men and women who have acknowledged Christ as their Lord and the Holy Spirit as their indwelling Guide. The Church is the elect assembly of the living God.

II. The Church is the household of God as well as His house, His peculiar dwelling-place; for the word which the Apostle uses has the double significance—house and household—and that word, God's "household" or family, is an illuminating picture of the Church. It gives you in a flash a whole volume of tender thoughts and relationships. The Church is God's family, united in kinship and affection by the common Fatherhood of God and the dear, condescending Brotherhood of Jesus; and there we clasp hands and join hearts in trust and love, conscious that faith has made us peculiarly the sons and daughters of the Almighty, and levelled us up to an indisputable equality. The Church is home life lifted to a higher plane. It is a sphere of common interests, sorrows, and joys. It is, or ought to be, a sort of sheltering roof to which every wanderer can turn when he is weary of the world's coldness and estrangement, and a place where the most friendless will find himself in a hallowed communion of sympathetic souls.

A Church is born of love; it breathes love, and feeds on it. It is girded with love; it is all ablaze with the pure flame of love divine. The heart-beats of a Church are love, and when those heart-beats are not felt the Church is dead. The *household of God*, and therefore not the household of class and party. The common distinctions of the world have no place there. There is no upper circle and no lower orders. A Christian Socialism is established, without redistribution of goods; built up, not by parliamentary enactment, but by the free movement of God's Spirit and the constraint of Jesus' love. The rich and poor meet together, and forget both their envies and their prides in the thought that divine grace equally exalts all, and that Jesus is the equal Saviour of all. We know, alas! that our actual church life too often perpetuates class divisions. The rich and the poor will not meet together—the workman will not kneel with the master. Prejudices on both sides are equally strong. The classes refuse to mix even before the mercy-seat and the cross. There are Churches of the upper class, and Churches of the middle class, and Labour Churches; but these are all woefully heterodox; they are direct contradictions of the divine idea. They do violence to the word Church who claim it for one order of men. We shall never see the Church shaped after the mind of Christ until we see one in which all sorts and conditions are equally welcome and equally at home.

The *household* of *God*—keep the emphasis on that. It is God's household, and therefore wider

than party; inclusive of all parties, in fact. A Church of Jesus Christ has no political bias; it wears no political badge or colour. It keeps both its worship and its work free from the party political atmosphere. It welcomes to its fellowship men of all parties who hold the fundamental faith. And when it becomes the servant, ally, or advocate of one party it ceases to be a Church and degenerates into a narrow sect or a club. In fact, a Church is not and cannot be political in the ordinary sense without destroying itself as a spiritual and divine institution. We cannot have it both ways. Throughout its long existence the Church has never given itself over to politics without ceasing to be spiritually minded. It has never united itself to one political party without withering up its right hand of power. And its ministers have never plunged into the stormy and contentious arena of politics without ceasing to be soul-winners and the spiritual guides of men. The individual members of a Church may be as keen for party as they please, but pulpit, communion-table, mercy-seat, and cross are above party, and a Church, as a Church, degrades itself and forgets its high calling when it becomes the annex of a party and ceases to be what it ever ought to be—the all-embracing household of God.

III. The Church is the witness and upholder of certain great, everlasting, and changeless truths, the pillar and groundwork, or supporting basement, of the truth. It is a figure which almost interprets itself. The truth is Jesus and the divine and eternal things which He revealed.

The truth is the once crucified but now risen and ascended Jesus, crowned with glory and out of the world's sight, like some lofty, cross-crowned dome of a stately building which is hidden in the passing clouds or fog, yet beneath which are the supporting pillars and basement, which can be seen of all. And the Church is the pillar and basement. The Church, in fact, has been appointed to make known, maintain, perpetuate, and keep for ever before the world those divine, eternal, and saving truths which Christ lived and died to reveal, and which He committed to His Church as a sacred trust.

The Church throughout the world is essentially one—one in spite of all its divisions, because it has essentially one faith. There are certain great momentous truths concerning God, and Christ's Divine Sonship, and all that He taught and suffered, which are believed, held tenaciously, jealously and tearfully defended by the whole Church, and by all who have any clear right to claim membership in it. There can be no real spiritual union and communion without great beliefs held in common. There may be immense diversity in details, and on the surface, but underneath there must be certain rock-principles, strong convictions, great certainties held by all. The oldest of Christian communities, and in some lands the most corrupt, has held together some fifteen centuries or more and realised in a measure the communion of saints, because, in spite of all its errors, pagan additions, and worldly policy, it has held tenaciously and unswervingly the great cardinal

verities of the Faith. Without that the grandest society in the world is but a thread of beads or a rope of sand. Without that a Church becomes simply a fortuitous concurrence of atoms loosely connected for a little time, perhaps, by the charm of some attractive personality and bound to dissolve in no great length of time. Men are trying to-day—they always have been trying—to establish Churches—Christian Churches they call them—without a creed, with hardly a common faith of any kind. Men may believe what they like if they are only actuated by good motives, drawn together by brotherly sentiments, and inclined to philanthropy. A Church of that sort always falls to pieces like a child's toy-house or a palace in the clouds. Sentiment is beautiful enough, in a way, but without solid truth and firm convictions at the base it is only the beauty of a dissolving dream. The sustaining strength of the whole Church, and of every Church, is in its deep-rooted beliefs which go down to the very foundation of things and its hold upon truths which cannot be shaken—such truths as the Incarnation mystery, the sinless perfection, the divine personality and sacrificial work of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, the judgment to come, and the life eternal. The Church goes on through all the changing times and changing fashions of men ever lifting up the same voice and reiterating the same indestructible message, whether its truths are acceptable or the reverse, whether the wisdom of the world praises or derides them, whether the spirit of the times runs with them or against; the

Church holds on without faltering, never shifting its ground from the fundamental things, ever assured that the truths which it holds are not for a day but for eternity, without change or shadow of turning, and that the world at last will take them because it cannot do without them. "The household of God, which is the Church, the pillar and ground of the truth."

CHAPTER X

THE GLORY AND POWER OF THE GOSPEL

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."—ROM. i. 16.

To us, now, it seems a small thing to say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Why should we be ashamed? It is an easy thing now to be proud of the Gospel of Christ, for we stand in the presence of its accomplished facts, and we see it recognised as the greatest and the ever-increasing force in the world. No, it requires no boldness and proves no merit to glory in that which all men speak well of; to swell the triumphal procession of an acknowledged victor. If St. Paul could have thrown himself, in imagination, into the place where we stand to-day, and been able to look back, as we do, upon nineteen centuries of Christian labour and advance, there would have been nothing very wonderful in this saying, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." But at that time all that we are witnesses of had yet to be proved. The Gospel, then, had won only a few scattered adherents, chiefly among the poor and uncultured. It had no church buildings, no organised ministry, no

standing in respectable society. No school of thinkers and writers had recognised it; no government or magistrates or civil power had noticed it, except to curse it as a disturbing pest; no poetry, art, genius, or literature had been brought into its service; no eloquence had extolled it; no wealth had been laid in tribute at its feet. It had been rejected by all rulers, priests, and dignified personages. In the eyes of the general world it was nothing but a vulgar story of an obscure Galilæan peasant who had been put to death as a criminal—put to a death so shameful that polite lips hardly cared to mention it. Think of all that, and then the weight of these words of St. Paul impresses you. It was wonderful, indeed, that he could speak with such absolute confidence about this Gospel, calling it the great power of God, anticipating the time when the despised name of Jesus would be incomparably mightier than Cæsar's, and when the truths which had their centre in the cross would have prevailed over all the magnificent pride and intellectual glory of that ancient world. Yes, it required a great prophetic vision to speak these words then: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth."

I. It requires no prophetic vision now. We can hardly imagine any man, with his eyes half open, talking about being ashamed of the Gospel now. There are, perhaps, a few fierce and malignant unbelievers who think that the world of the future would get on better without it, and who would be

glad, if they could, to sweep it away. But these are hardly sane men. An unnatural hatred has disordered their vision, or the love of evil has darkened their hearts. The vast multitude of men who live in Christian lands, even though the Gospel has little hold of them, think with a sort of pride of Christianity, and all who have yielded to its power never think about it save with a sense of glorying and exultancy. For the triumphs of the Gospel confront us everywhere. In every great city the masterpieces of architecture are those which Christian art has raised. Wherever we travel, unless it be in heathen lands, the most attractive buildings are those around which cluster long Christian memories, and which owed their existence to Christian devotion. In every famous picture-gallery the paintings which charm us most, and speak to us with the inspiration of genius, are those which show us apostles, saints, and heroes of the long Christian warfare. When we read the records of the past, every page that is best worth reading, which we read over and over again, tells us of some of the doings of men who owed all their courage, goodness, and grandeur to the faith of Jesus, and learnt all their self-forgetting virtues and service at the foot of His cross. The story of humanity for the last eighteen hundred years would be a dull, monotonous record of crimes, cruelties, and degradations were it not relieved of its dulness and illumined with bright constellations by the figures of noble men and women who counted all as loss that they might win Christ, and hold fast His truth and receive from Him the

reward of duty well done. And when we look around on the world of to-day, Christian thought and endeavour meet us at every turn in forms of beauty and devotion and transcendent grace. There is no book worth reading which has not borrowed some of its tone and feeling from Nazareth and Calvary. Our literature throughout, save that portion of it which reverent and decent minds avoid, is tinctured with the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. Our politics dare not openly avow any other principles than those of peace and justice towards all which the great Cross-bearer taught. Our very Socialisms, Secularisms, Agnosticisms, where they are bold enough to deny His name, clothe themselves with the sentiments of brotherhood and charity which they have taken unconsciously from Him.

And everywhere the *works* of the Gospel are in evidence. You see them in Sunday school, ragged school, refuges, homes for the fallen, orphanages, hospitals, and institutions countless, which lay His healing hand upon the ignorant, diseased, and miserable, and preach a message of recovery and hope to the most abject and desperate. You see and hear of hundreds of thousands of homes and private lives into which this Gospel brings patience, strength, courage, and gladness. You cannot count or estimate how many hearts are nerved by it to endure the disappointments of life, the rebuffs of fortune, the stings of the world's malice and neglect, the weariness of sickness, and the blows of bereavement; how many are made brave to struggle on through all the fierce and ungenerous

competitions and keep their heads lifted above the deep waters, and face death when it comes with a cheerful smile, because they have Him with them who saved the sinking Peter in the days of old, and took the sting from death by bearing it Himself. Think of all this—nay, think of only a small part of it; fix your eyes on but a narrow strip of that wonderful panorama of Gospel achievements which is constantly passing before your eyes, and then you will say, indeed, with a great outburst of gratitude and joy, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." You are not ashamed of Christianity. No. The grandeur of its works, the magnitude of its triumphs, the immensity of its power in the world, forbid that.

II. But bring the thought of the text a little nearer home. Men may have nothing but respectful and reverent, and even proud, thoughts of Christianity, and yet have little hold upon the Gospel as regards themselves. St. Paul meant two things here—first, that he gloried in the Gospel for himself, gloried in confessing it; and, secondly, that he had unlimited confidence in its power over others.

First, he gloried in the thought that he himself was a Christian, that the Gospel had laid hold of him, and held him fast in chains of love; that its truths and promises and hopes had taken entire possession of him and formed the strength and joy of his life. They were nine-tenths of life to him, and the other tenth also. And he wanted all the world to know of it, if the world cared to

know. He was eager to confess it in every scene and company. "I, Paul, who was once a Pharisee and the chief of sinners, am now Christ's man, and to be that is all the world to me." That was what St. Paul meant by "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." Now, could we all use these words with the same meaning? Most of us, I trust, could. You think of your Christian faith and your Christian hopes as the glory of your lives, as a richer treasure than all your other possessions, and as the crown of all the honours you enjoy. You believe that when you make a public profession of faith in Christ you are making the grandest avowal of your lives, and you are really glad to have it known, anywhere and everywhere, that you are endeavouring to be followers of the great Master. It is not so with all. We would it were! There are some who have not a little Christian feeling and belief. In their secret hearts they have a great deal of loyalty and genuine love towards Christ, and they are trusting in Him for salvation. But they rather take pains to hide it all. They rather shrink from being marked out in public as Christian men and women. And in no company in which they move do they let it be known, in any distinct way, that they are disciples of Jesus. Never do they speak these words, in any confident tone, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." I fear that they are just a little ashamed of it. And there are others who would like to take the honest and noble side. They are often drawn to it—many a time their hearts half yield to the Gospel; but then they

always draw back, out of cowardly shame. They do not even attempt to live as Christians. They follow with the multitude, often even to do evil. Yes, possibly you are afraid to be a Christian because the Christian life is not a popular thing among the set, the companions, the work-people, the class, in which you move. They care for none of these things. They despise and sneer at them, and you would be visited by their witless laughter and shallow ridicule if you stood out as a believer. And therefore you do it not; you are ashamed of the Gospel of Christ! Yet you had better be ashamed of the sunlight, or ashamed of your own mother and wife, or ashamed that you have a soul within you to be saved.

Secondly, St. Paul meant by these words, as he tells us, that, as a Christian worker, he had unlimited confidence in the Gospel, and in the divine forces which are represented by the Gospel. He believed that they were the power of God unto salvation to every one that believed. No matter where he went, among what class of people, Roman, Jew, barbarian, he was sure that the weapons which he carried would be effective in breaking down intellectual and moral barriers, melting hard hearts, and converting enemies into soldiers of faith. It was because of this assurance that he so mightily prevailed. He never knew fear or despair, though he had to meet heathenism and degradation in their most revolting forms, though he had to deal with the grossest sensuality and the most obstinate unbelief.

The Gospel of Christ's love *had won victories*

over those things, and would still win them. And, believing this, his ministry never failed to secure subdued and renewed souls for the Master's service.

Oh that God would give to us who are fellow-labourers with St. Paul more of this grand confidence in the weapons of our warfare—in the message we preach and teach, in the Cross-power which we bring to bear upon the hard and unwilling hearts of men.

We all need more of it, whether we are preachers, Sunday-school teachers, mission workers, or simply parents praying for the conversion of our own children. We are frightened by the hardness of heart we encounter, by the stubborn wills that repel our efforts, by the deep-rooted habits of sin and stony prejudices which meet us, or by the callous indifference which turns our earnest appeals to wasted breath. We forget—nay, we hardly believe—that the very power of God is in our words and prayers, and that the Spirit who speaks and works through us is mightier than all these things. There is not an evil force in this world of any kind which has not yielded a thousand times to the all-victorious power of the Gospel we preach. And, if we have sufficient faith in our message, these forces will yield again. Would that we could always labour, pray, preach, and teach with the feeling that Christ's cross can do almost impossible things; yes, things which men deem absolutely impossible. According to the measure of our confidence will be our success. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ."

PART II

THE GREAT THOUGHTS OF ST. PAUL

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT HUMAN BROTHERHOOD

"For we are members one of another."—EPH. iv. 25.

THE words mean that each individual of the human race is related to every other, just as the several organs and limbs of our body are related. The assertion is usually made of those who are united to Christ by faith, as if they were one, the connected parts of one body. Here, however, the truth is given a wider range. It is applied to every man's neighbour, and if we ask, "Who is my neighbour?" the answer is given in a certain parable which we are not likely to forget. The Apostle is repeating here one of his favourite thoughts, a thought insisted upon in one Epistle after another, and expressed in a variety of ways: "None of us liveth to himself"; "There is one family in heaven and earth." Each life is part and parcel of the larger universal life. Humanity is one bundle strung together by its Creator. We are connected like the fibres of a rope, like the links in a chain, like the branches of a tree, like the waves of the ocean; or, to use the Scripture figure again, like parts of the same body. It was St. Paul who gave us this particular figure, but it was St. Paul's Master who gave both him and

us the truth. Christ spoke it, breathed it, lived it, wove it into all His teachings, exemplified it in His sufferings, glorified it in His death. To Him humanity was one. He saw it almost as we see one face; He felt it almost as we feel the beatings of one heart. He carried its griefs, infirmities, and sins, and just as if they had belonged to one heart and life. It was all a living part of Himself, joined together and joined to Him in inseparable bonds of sympathy and fellowship. When He became incarnate it was the Divine One entering into the whole race; when He died He grasped the whole of humanity in His own person, and died for all; and when He rose again the whole family was lifted up to a new life with Him. If we could understand this, if we could realise how completely He identified Himself with the race, and the race with Himself, we might come far nearer to a comprehension of the Atonement, how He bore our sins and guilt, our darkness and shame, our very penalties, in His own body on the tree. The mystery is dark and insoluble to us chiefly because, in our separate individuality and isolation, we never feel one with our fellow-men as He felt with all. To His thoughts and sympathies the mass of men were always as one man, and that one man part of Himself. They were one family, one brotherhood; one connected and *interdependent* organism, one heart with innumerable throbbings and emotions; or, as St. Paul expresses it, "one body." "We are members one of another."

Now this was one of the greatest strides which human thought ever made. When St. Paul saw and an-

nounced this truth he lifted himself two thousand years and more ahead of his own generation. He grasped, in prophetic vision, what the world would only learn after long, weary centuries of pressure, strife, conflict, suffering, failure, and progress. We, in this age of boasted enlightenment, are only just beginning to take it in. Our vaunted civilisation has got so far on the road to omniscience that it is still in the rear of a converted Pharisee who lived in the time of the Cæsars! Our wisest and best men, perhaps, do now see this truth as through a glass darkly, while the great bulk of men have, so far, no inkling of it at all. Yet, were it fully grasped and habitually acted upon, it would solve most of our anxious social problems. It would settle most of the disputes of parties and classes. It would put an end to the perpetual jealousies and antipathies which embroil the nations in war, and it would quickly change the face of the world. Let me remind you of some of its applications—how it is true both in the particular and the universal, affecting us in things near and in things remote. "We are members one of another."

I. It is exemplified in the home circle. *There* we get our elementary lessons in it, and learn to understand its wider applications in the world outside. God teaches us all the rudiments of religion in that primary school. A well-ordered Christian home gives us the truest picture that we can find on earth of the heaven above. In the tender love of parents we get our first and best conceptions of the Divine Fatherhood, and in

the pains and burdens which a mother suffers for her child is the everlasting type of that vicarious principle which is seated and enthroned in the very heart and government of God. Around the fireside, on the domestic hearth, we are for ever unconsciously weaving the "pattern of things in the mount." There, especially, we are reminded of the mystical bonds which make many lives one. The family is indeed one body. It is overshadowed with the same anxieties, it trembles with the same fears, and is thrilled with the same joys. Parent and child, brother and sister, are roped together, and for the most part climb and fall together. The dishonour of one is the disgrace of all; the misfortune of one is the sorrow of all; the promotion of one is the elevation of all. When a son takes to evil ways he does something more than blacken his own character and imperil his own future: he darkens the lives of those about him, he wounds and half breaks the hearts that love him best. Each member of the household has the power of blessing or cursing the whole of it; each one can put the glow of pride or the blush of shame on every cheek; each one can set music playing or torturing worms gnawing in every heart. Whether it be father, mother, son, or daughter, not one of them "perishes alone in his iniquity." If one suffer, all suffer in a greater or less degree, and alas! those who suffer most are often those who deserve it least. In many a home in which sin is done there is a miniature Calvary where innocent ones bear the guilt, and perhaps in part expiate it; and in many a home

where one lives near to Christ virtue flows from the garments of that one which more or less heals all.

We often cry out against that tragical law which the Scriptures emphasise: "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children." "Grossly unjust!" we say; "morally illogical! an incomprehensible mystery! Why should guilt be allowed to transmit its loathsome legacy to those whose angels do always behold the face of the Father?" Yes, but do not forget that this law has its golden, transverse side. The righteousnesses, virtues, prayers, noble lives, successes, and honours of the fathers are equally visited on the children, and they are blessed, beyond all their deserts, for the fathers' sakes. It would fare ill with some of us were we not daily gathering the harvest sowed by the patience and devotion of praying sires. It is, in the main, a wholesome and saving law, a powerful corrective of evil, a mighty incentive to goodness. It restrains a man at every step. It preaches righteousness to him at every turn of life—at least, it ought to do, and will do unless he has either the heart of a beast or the irresponsible frivolity of a fool. The thought that in his life and course of action others are involved, that in falling he is dragging them down, that in fighting life's battle worthily he is paving their way to victory, is like a warning sentinel or pleading angel arresting or directing one's wayward feet. There would be far more sin and sorrow in the world were it not for this awful, solemn binding of lives together for better and for worse. "We are members one of another."

II. This principle is enforced in every aspect of Church life. There, however, it does not always come to the surface and declare itself so conspicuously as in the home. In the Church we are often only half conscious of it, and in some Churches it hardly finds a place. There are fashionable sanctuaries where the communion of saints is advertised in a creed, and never realised as a solemnity. Strangers meet like touching circles, and edge one another off with the cold salute or glance of frigid unconcern, and never dream that that name of Jesus, which they all repeat, is mocked on the lips unless it kindles tenderness and affection in the heart. There are few of us who feel as sweetly akin as we ought to do when we kneel together at our Father's feet. We rarely take upon ourselves the troubles and anxieties of our fellow-members, as we bear the misfortunes that fall upon parent, child, or brother. Our Christian fellowship never more than approximates to the ideal which the Master showed. And yet, only a prejudiced unbelief would deny that there is more of warm and living sympathy, more endearing friendships and blessed fraternity among those who revere the Name than in any other assembly, club, or society, in the world. And wherever Christ's Presence is really felt there the sweet words of John Fawcett find an echo in every heart:

> We share our mutual woes,
> Our mutual burdens bear,
> And often for each other flows
> The sympathising tear.

The Church is the household of God, subject to the same common impulses, movements, and conditions as an ordinary home. In moral and spiritual things, especially, we are bound intimately together. If a man disgraces his Christian profession he throws the shadow of that disgrace upon all with whom he is associated. The whole body feels the stab and tingles with the shame. Yes! and a few exceptionally saintly lives put a halo of sanctity on a whole community. It is said that disease is contagious, while health keeps its virtue within itself. You may tell that in Gath and Askelon, but tell it not in Jerusalem. Whisper it not in a church. There one gives out the sweetness and grace that are in him. There is a certain temper or atmosphere in a church which affects all its members. If there be a spirit of worldliness, it creeps over all hearts. If there are choking fogs of doubt, all breathe them. If there is icy coldness, all hearts get frost-bitten. Zeal is contagious, missionary fervour is catching, enthusiasm spreads like fire, revival quickenings touch the deadest heart with some emotion. God cannot bless one without blessing many. When the high tide fills one channel, it tends to the same level in all connected channels. We share out our gifts, and he who climbs to the mountain-tops of faith draws others after him. Everywhere in the religious life there are these mighty currents of sympathetic feeling and action. We are carried forward and backward together on the same flowing and ebbing waves.

The *thought has a far wider range.* Not only

are the members of one Church woven together in the same spiritual movement, but all the Churches. Christendom is linked together, in spite of its divisions. The same lethargies, at times, creep over it all; the same mighty impulses sweep over it all. There are periods when the polar airs of negativism nip off all its buds and arrest all its fruit-bearing, and seasons when its faith is clear and strong as the sunlight and its branches laden with summer fruit. Whenever there are great religious upheavals and awakenings they are not, and cannot be, confined to one quarter. The power which first quickens one slumbering or torpid Church presently sets the dry bones shaking everywhere. The Reformation which gave new spiritual life to the Teutonic races roused in all the Catholic nations more religious zeal and activity. The fire which set Luther and John Knox and Latimer aflame with evangelical fervour sent Jesuit missionaries to China, India, and Africa. The Methodist revival cleansed and almost re-created the faith and energy of all the Christian communities in this land. Every true revivalist has, like John Wesley, the world for his parish, for the whole Christian world is more or less stirred by the forces which energised him, and there is "nothing hid from the heat thereof." If there be a deepening of the religious sentiment, every religious heart has part in it. Every prayer for the outpouring of the Spirit is a prayer for the whole body of Christ. God spurns our limitations. We ask for showers of blessing on our own garden, and lo! they come down plentifully on our

neighbour's garden as well. God made the Evangelical Free Churches one before the National Federation recognised it. He bound them by a hundred sympathetic ties. We are all rich or poor together. We advance or retreat together. It is madness to suppose that one can be strengthened at the cost of another. As well might a navigator try to fill his sails with the winds stolen from his companions' ships. You cannot bottle up the breezes of heaven and make them private property. When they blow fresh from the hills of God they bring health to all our cheeks. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I *burn* not?" "We are not divided, all one body we." When Pentecost is about, all the sects realise it as the heart of one man, and the sacred fire is on the lips of all. One may get it sooner than another, just as the old beacon-fires were kindled. But the lighting of one signalled the lighting of the next, and the next, until all the hills were ablaze. We are fools and blind if we think that, like Jacob, we can rob our brother of his blessing without impoverishing and disinheriting ourselves. There are Christian people in this land who wish and pray that the Free Churches might decline, waste away, disappear. I stretch the word Charity to its utmost limits when I call them Christians. The thing is impossible. To us it is almost unthinkable. But were such a thing to happen all the religious fervour and strength of the land would be carried away on the same back-flow; and the Established Church itself would be left spiritually defunct, in possession of endowments,

orders, and the empty shell of its ceremonies, and with nothing else but the corpse of its former self. Again, we are often told that *we* Free Churchmen are enemies of the Established Church, that we are seeking to destroy the Church. How much longer will that railing accusation find currency? How much longer will that bugbear be used to frighten children? Were we capable of such besotted folly and guilt we should forfeit every right and title to the name of Christ—nay, we should be engaged in an act of *felo-de-se*. To wound any Church is to give back-handed strokes at ourselves. We want every Church made strong for Christ, weaned from its trust in princes and parliaments that it may hold harder to the Master, freed from its crutches that it may walk at liberty, delivered from the crushing nightmare of priestism that it may expand with the fuller life of the Spirit. And perhaps the best way to effect that is not so much to denounce the evil that is in a Church as to overcome that evil with our larger good. Let our Churches have a revival of spiritual energy. Let the channels of evangelicalism be filled to overflowing with the waters of life, and those waters will stream over all the locks and floodgates into the channels of our episcopal neighbours, sweeping away all the carnal, worldly, sacerdotal stuff on a diviner tide of power. God help us all to realise more our vital connection!—that we are "members one of another."

III. And now I ask you to take the words in their widest range. They are true of the greater world outside the Church, true of the nation and

of the whole human family. We are constantly having the fact brought home to us that all souls are God's, and therefore ours; that humanity is one, that all sections, classes, communities, and races are governed, swayed, or affected in varying degrees by the same forces, influences, agencies, and movements. A nation is like a mass of nerves in the same body. If there are troubles, calamities, bankruptcies, panics, labour disputes, they touch all sections, some more than others, but all in a measure. Nay, more. There is no event of any magnitude taking place in any quarter of the globe which does not spread out, like the widening circle on the water, to every part of the globe. Silver crazes, bimetallic manias across the Atlantic, are felt in India, China, and Britain. High tariffs imposed in countries far away shut up factories close to our own doors. Sugar bounties in Germany make destitution in Jamaica. Famines and plagues in India stop the looms in Lancashire. A failure of the harvest in Russia means less bread for the children of our poor. If there is commercial stagnation in Australia, thousands of people suffer for it in the home-land. It is the most suicidal folly for one nation to suppose that it can permanently enrich itself at the expense of others. The poverty or enrichment of all ultimately fall and rise together. Tariff walls are built by well-meaning but blind men, who have lost sight of their own best interests in losing sight of the law of Christ. The world is joined by sympathetic cords. Railways, ships, and electric cables are all helping to reveal to us God's thought of His one family. He maketh the winds

His angels, his messengers flaming fire, and all events, when rightly understood, enforce the Gospel truth that "He hath made of one blood all nations of men." "We are members one of another."

Think how, in the every-day occurrences of our city life and national life, we suffer with one another, and often for one another. Think how the selfish people who imagine that the sorrows, sins, woes, degradations, and despairs of others are no concern of theirs are constantly having it brought home to them, in painful ways, that their egotistical philosphy is contrary to God's law, and opposed to human facts. No man can live in luxurious wealth and ease, heedless of the penury and squalor about him, without sooner or later paying the penalty. We cannot have filth and disease in the courts and hovels of the poor but in due time some breath of infection will steal into the perfumed chambers of the wealthy. If there is fever in the sweater's den, where perhaps the rich man's clothes are made, that fever, in some unlucky day, will be carried into the mansion. If there are ignorance, drunkenness, and discontent among workmen every manufacturer and capitalist will be the poorer for it. If there are swarms of neglected children, or unhealthy, or taught little of morals and religion, or children whose language is lewd and profane growing up to manhood, it means coming mischief, anxiety, and sorrow for all classes of society. However you try to separate classes, you cannot. Mightier forces sweep away your barriers with a laugh of scorn. You say, "Am I my brother's keeper?" A thousand voices

answer, in tragic tones, "Yes!" And if you refuse to recognise the fact, God will, in one way or another, make you pay for it. Do you take no interest in the moral well-being of the town you live in? Is it nothing to you whether good men rule its affairs or men of the indifferent sort? By and by the enormous folly of this selfishness will be demonstrated to you, for the immoralities, vices, corruptions of any class recoil in a hundred ways upon those who have neglected to deal with them. We are indeed bound together. Yes, sometimes in a way which it makes one nervous to think about. Give a passing thought to the awful visitation which, not many years ago, played havoc in the town of Maidstone. Some thousands of lives were imperilled, and I do not know how many graves filled, merely because a few wretched, unclean creatures out of the London slums had crept out of their filthy surroundings to pick hops in the fields and by the water-brooks of the fair Kentish county. A terrible thing, you say, that those innocent Maidstone people should suffer thus for the neglects, vices, and sins with which they had nothing to do. And it is, indeed, terrible. Yet all through human society the same principle is at work.

In every quarter you find vicarious suffering. You find the good involved in the evil of the wicked, the just bearing the cross laid upon them by the doings of the unjust. Do you complain that it is not fair and right and equal? Well, perhaps it is not fair, in your limited view. But you have to submit to it. It is God's established order, and it is done in God's wisdom and mercy,

too. It is all to force upon us this truth, which we are very unwilling to learn—that we "are members one of another." It is all to destroy the selfish instincts in us, and make us care for our brothers more. If each man suffered just for his own sins, and no other, it would harden pity, quench sympathy, and almost kill love. It would make the righteous careless what became of the unrighteous. It would cut us off from all participation in the sufferings of Christ, and all realisation of His joy. We are joined together that each one may be in a measure forced to be his brother's keeper. It is not enough to be just ourselves; we must seek to make others just. In our limited degree, the sins of the world are laid upon us, as they were upon Christ. So long as the world has its sorrows, woes, wrongs, moral diseases, and spiritual darkness, we all feel the burden, the pain, and the shame of them. And by these things God teaches and impels us to take part with Him in saving others. By these things He is always condemning our narrow interests and blind self-love, and urging us to nobler efforts of the Christ-like sort. By these things He is ever reminding us that none of us can live unto himself.

God grant that we all, and all our Churches, may rise to a truer conception of our relationship to the great world around, may feel, as the Saviour felt, the throbbing heart of our one vast human brotherhood, and prove, by the energy and compassion of our saving work, that our love has no limits and our kinship no boundaries, that all men are dear to us as they were to Him, because we "are members one of another."

CHAPTER XII

THE UNLIMITED POSSESSIONS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

"As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."—2 Cor. vi. 10.

This is one of a series of paradoxes, delightful contradictions, beautiful puzzles—yet only puzzling to those who read without thinking, only puzzling to those who stop at the outward form, and who have no vision of the inner truth. Things and attributes apparently as opposite as light and darkness are asserted in the same breath of the same persons, and the man with just mind enough to make him a logician, and without the heart-power which opens the deeper and higher chambers of life, will say, "How can these things be? Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; dying, yet intensely alive; unknown, yet well known?" But every one who truly lives the life of faith knows that a hundred things meet there which the dull senses cannot reconcile, but which the profounder spirit clasps together in strange unison. Is not every Christian a sinner and a saint? a child of heaven and a clod of earth? an eternal building of God and a frail perishing tabernacle? a spirit winged

with hope and lifted up to raptures, and a creature weighted and crippled by the earthly environment climbing slowly, through fears and stumblings and humiliations, to see the face of God? Any one of us in whom divine thought and purpose move amid the human encumberment could write a string of contradictions as startling and true as those which the Apostle gives us here.

Now, in the particular words which we have read, St. Paul speaks of the poverty and affluence of the Christian life. In appearance—that is as ordinary eyes take its measure—it is in a state of destitution, but actually, as God surveys it, and as it feels in its own deep, secret experience, it is abundantly rich, its possessions are beyond count; no table of figures, no arithmetical calculation can express them. "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." Let us not forget that the point and force of the antithesis are supplied by the actual worldly circumstances of the Apostle and his fellow-believers. The contrast is not so sharp, it even disappears altogether when we take into view the average Christian congregation of to-day. I would fain believe that you have the higher possessions in which St. Paul rejoiced—that you are rich in faith and hope and spiritual treasures; but I could not, without a touch of irony, describe you as poor and destitute of goods in a worldly sense. You complain of straitened circumstances sometimes when demands are made upon your generosity; but everyone knows what that means. The days are gone by when Christianity was

linked with grim poverty, and men went out empty and disinherited to wage their grand warfare with the world. This man Paul was as poor as his Master had been, with hardly money enough to purchase food and lodging on his missionary journeys, and owning nothing, in fact, but the raiment which he wore. The Christians to whom he wrote in Corinth were generally people of scanty means, most of them slaves who, in point of law, owned nothing, not even their own wives and children, or their own bodies. It is necessary to remember this if we would appreciate the power of such words as these: "As poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things."

But now, what means this apparently extravagant assertion that Christ's servants and witnesses are masters of unlimited wealth? Is it a flight of rhetoric, or a piece of sober truth? We must settle, first, what it is that makes a man rich. And here we may take either the lower or the higher ground; we may be content with the superficial view, or we may grasp the deeper thought.

I. And, first, it may be asserted, without question, that a man's real wealth is not in anything outside, but in himself. It is what you are that makes you indisputable owners, and not what you have. The more you advance in knowledge and experience of life, the more deeply you are convinced of that fundamental fact. You began, perhaps, by reckoning as your possessions only the external things to which the law gives you a title: the goods and chattels, the money, houses, and estates

which minister to your pleasures and gratify your sense of power. And the vulgar, sensuous nature never gets beyond that coarser valuation. But in course of time, as your thoughts expand and the deeper channels of emotion and joy are opened out, you learn to think of other possessions as more and dearer than these. You acquire certain tastes, sympathies, modes of thought, and moral habits, which separate you from low and ill-bred people. You gather stores of knowledge. The mind is enriched from many sides. You learn to appreciate things lovely in art, literature, and music, in the world of nature and the world of humanity. Your heart broadens out to embrace friendships, affections, love of wife and child, love of all good men. Then you enter the religious life, and lo! there grow in you the qualities of reverence, aspiration, trust, patience, gentleness, courage, and hope. There is something God-like in you. You can think God's thoughts, you can feel His pities and affections. And you know, then, that all these endowments and qualities of mind and spirit are your own, *your possession*—yes, in a far deeper and truer sense your possession than material property can be, for wealth is only life's garment which a man may put on or put off, and remain in himself substantially the same; but these other things are part of the inner life of the man. They are inseparable, they cannot be taken away from him by any freaks of fortune. And when you have these you feel that you would not barter them for all the material good in the world. Our out-

ward possessions we hold on lease, and the lease may terminate any day; but these inner qualities which make the very substance of life we hold in indestructible right. They are ours for ever; they make us what we are and shall be beyond death through all the life to come, unless we cease to be ourselves.

Yes, that is the true, grand idea of ownership to which every man comes who reads the problems of life aright. It is what he has within that constitutes his wealth: the mind enriched with the highest knowledge and the purest truth, and the heart inspired with goodness responding to all that is noble and God-like, and beating with all the sweet, brave impulses of prayer, devotion, and love. Where that is, you may well say, "As having nothing, yet possessing all things." And if you start from that point you are led on to take a still larger account of your possessions.

II. All things belong to you which serve in any way to develop the inner life, and to make you rich in noble qualities and inspiring thoughts. We talk proudly about being heirs of all the ages, and in a surface sense it is true of everyone who lives amid our modern civilisation; but in its deeper meaning it is only true of those who aspire to live the good and divine life. The Christian of to-day is indeed the heir of all the ages; he enters into all their best legacies; he is in possession of all the highest things that they did, said, and thought. We have a real property in all the saints and martyrs, in all who fought the battle of faith and righteousness, in all the inspired men,

all the prophets, psalmists, and apostles, all the God-endowed men who have helped to illumine the human mind with heavenly truths and to stimulate the human will to fruitful endeavours. They were lights kindled at heaven's pure fire, not for their own glory, but to shine upon the face of humanity through all coming ages, investing it with some of the radiance in which they walked. They belong to us. We live in their company for ever; they talk to us as their familiar friends. We think their thoughts; we are fired by the fervour of their devotion, and unconsciously influenced by their example; we are soothed by their psalms, swayed by their appeals, cheered by their predictions, lifted Godward by their spiritual soarings. We pray in the language they taught us; our hymns are full of their sentiments. Our spirits constantly feel the impulse of their spirits, the kindling sparks from their impassioned love and glowing energy. Our whole nature is steeped in the legacy which they bequeathed. Nay, not only these greater souls, but innumerable other good men and women have given us something of themselves: all the precious lives that we have read of, all the brave and saintly men and women with whom we have come in contact, parents who prayed for us, teachers who suggested to us noble thoughts, books which spoke to our best manhood from writers whose faces we have never seen, men who lived as they prayed, women who showed in their faces the face of Christ. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands of good men and women have laid their treasures at our feet, and contri-

buted to make us all the best that we are. And their work in us abides. It makes our real wealth. In a very true sense we own them and all that they did for us. "Having nothing, yet possessing all things."

III. If a man's wealth is what he is and what he hopes to be, then all the experiences of a Christian life should contribute to his possessions and make him richer in those treasures which are inalienable. They minister to the building-up of the Christ-like man. Is life haunted by the dread shadow of change? It should help surely to bind the heart fast to the unchanging Love and Power. Is life full of uncertainties? Out of that come prayer and trust. Does the sun shine on a course of continued prosperity? It should inspire only the exalted sense of gratitude. Are there sorrows to bear? They are to make us brave and patient. Is there a bitter cup to drink? It is to bring us into fellowship with Him who drank the bitterest cup of all. Are you disappointed and cast down? It is to give you larger and purer hopes, and to brace you for new endeavours. Does the shadow of death constantly flit by? It is to rebuke our idolatry of earthly things, and set us on immortal strivings. Do we fear to lose our loved ones? It is to make us more gentle and careful towards them while they live. Are we surrounded by evil men? It is to make us hate the evil and strive more resolutely after good. Is there moral darkness around? The more need for our light to shine. Are we in the midst of true and earnest men? Their example should inspire us. Do we

walk with the ungodly? It is a distinct call to bear witness. Do we mourn over the vast evils, wrongs, and sorrows of the world? It is God's summons to us to bear ourselves valiantly in the fight. What Christian man can look upon the great mass of life which moves around him, this ocean of unutterable longings and awful heavings, of unbelief and ungodliness, and the sorrow which comes from sin, without feeling an impelling force which sends him on to labour and to wrestle, to sympathise and pray, and take his part in the noble warfare of faith? All these things are ours, to make us better men, to enrich life with God-like feelings, energies, and sympathies.

The past is ours, with all its hallowed traditions, its sacred memories, its beautiful legacies of truth, examples, and illustrious names. *The present is ours*, with all its trying experiences to establish our faith, its temptations to prove our integrity, its needs to teach us prayer, its griefs to purify our emotions, its great volume of human woes to draw out our pities, its innumerable calls for service to make us obedient and earnest men.

And *the future is ours*, to paint the prosaic dulness of the present with colours fetched from a more heavenly clime, and to fill whatever dreary hours we have with the golden pictures of hope, and to make us strong for all that labour to which we are called.

For truly, the future belongs to none except the Christian. The democracy says, youth says, the nations across the Atlantic say, the world of science, and a multitude of voices say, "The future

belongs to us." None have a right to say it save those who have made themselves companions in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. The future belongs to the men and women who are linked with Him in saving purpose, in righteous aims, in the endeavour to walk in the light and spread the light. All things come to them, and will come. And the steadfast belief in this sustains them in all labour and glorifies with hope the whole firmament of heaven and earth. So the Christian owns everything, for everything adds, or should add, to his strength and wealth and joy in God, to the fulness of life here and life hereafter.

And you can understand what St. Paul meant when he said, "Having nothing, yet possessing all things."

CHAPTER XIII

FOREKNOWLEDGE AND PREDESTINATION

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."—ROM. viii. 29, 30.

ONE rarely ventures, or even dares, to preach from this text now, though he may have been preaching half a lifetime. And that itself is an indication of the change which has passed over religious thought, and of the transference of our affections from speculative doctrines to things more practical. The texts which our fathers loved, which they regarded as the very cream, honey, and gold of the Gospel, have been well-nigh banished from the pulpit. The themes on which they meditated and conversed with inexhaustible curiosity and delight would provoke nothing but drowsiness and impatience in a modern congregation. Milton, in "Paradise Lost," represents the angels in heaven engaged in lofty talk about the mysteries of God's foreknowledge, and man's free-will and predestination and effectual calling. These were just the topics to which the religious minds of Milton's

time were continually drawn, and he thought that the things which interested mortals would have a supreme attraction for angelic minds. That world of speculation is not our world at all. We have left it far behind. Moreover, we are decidedly shy of such texts as this, because they were once made the battle-ground of hostile creeds, and wrangled over by Calvinist and Arminian until all the sweet life-blood was let out of them, and their true meaning hidden in the blinding dust which the strife stirred up. That strife is dead now, well-nigh as dead as an Egyptian mummy, and we have almost buried the texts which supplied its weapons in the grave thereof. Yet surely St. Paul had a noble thought in these words if we could only read it with fresh, unbiassed minds, and deliver it from all the hard and unlovely misconceptions with which it has been loaded.

"For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate." It was an awful doctrine which our fathers found in these words: that a privileged few were foreordained from all eternity to enjoy the favour of God and the raptures of heaven for ever, and that all the rest, the vast majority, were created and sent into the world with their terrible destiny fixed by unchangeable decree, pre-doomed to reprobation and everlasting pains. It seems inconceivable to us that such a thought of God could be held, as it was, by good and tender-hearted men who had sat at the feet of Jesus, and saw the pity and love-light in His eyes. It would hardly be possible to name it now

without producing a shudder, and a fierce revolt of indignant emotion against the monstrous injustice and cruelty of the thing. It has gone for ever, driven out, slain, and extinguished by the gentler thoughts of a nobler and more Christ-like faith.

Whatever St. Paul meant, we feel that he could not mean that, and even if he did we should decline to follow him. We should hold to the justice and mercy of God, in spite of all. But what the great Apostle had in mind was something vastly different from that. He declares here that God, from the first, had a vision of a nobler race of men, who would be sons of God indeed, who would be chosen and called to share the mind of Christ and be His witnesses among men. God, who foresaw and predestined the Incarnation, the gift of His well-beloved Son to the world, and that life of spotless purity and matchless sorrow, foresaw and predestined also that there should gather round this Christ men after His own heart, swayed with the same purpose, who should be themselves Christs on a smaller scale, so that, instead of one Son of God, there should be many, and that He, the great Forerunner, should be as the Firstborn among many brethren. That was what God foreknew and determined long before it came to pass—that there would be loyal and obedient hearts who would yield to the charms of Jesus, and take up the cross with Him, and follow Him in the service of self-forgetting faith, and in the service of humanity. God foreknew them, and when the time came He called them

out, and endowed them with the Spirit of the Master, and sealed and equipped them for their appointed work. *That* is St. Paul's idea of election, and the divine idea of election which runs through all the sacred writings; and every other idea of election is but a travesty and a caricature of that. There is no mention here of a favouritism which sets a few apart for the enjoyment of heavenly bliss. That may be implied as an after-result, but if St. Paul was thinking of that at all it was quite a secondary thought.

The purpose of the predestination was to shape men in the image of Jesus Christ, for toil and work and patient endurance in this world, and to bestow upon them spiritual gifts and graces, that they might labour and suffer for, and guide and lead, their fellow-men as He did. "Predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ." And we know what that means. The image of Christ is ever before us! The Man of toil and long-suffering, the Man of meekness, pity, and forgiveness, the Man whose heart was a fountain of love, the Man who made Himself the servant of all, and stooped under every burden, and drank every bitter cup, that He might be the world's Healer and the Saviour of the lost. To make men of that kind is the purpose of God's electing choice. There is no selfish pampering and divine partiality there, but divine love calling out men to do the works of love, and enriching them with noble gifts that they may undertake beautiful responsibilities. You are sometimes afraid of these words "election" and "predestination." You have almost dropped

them out of religious speech. They have a savour of pharisaical pride and smug self-complacency. Possibly you say you do not believe in the thing at all, and it is not desirable that you should believe in it as it was once believed in. But I should like to remind you that the thing itself is a beautiful and dread fact to which no one can be blind. It runs all through life, and you cannot get away from it. There is predestination everywhere, confronting you in forms both sad and lovely. It was a predestination, with which you had nothing to do, that fixed the place of your birth, the quality of your parentage, and the manner of your training. It was predestination that made you the child of a praying home, and that caused you to be born and educated amid sweet and hallowed influences. It was predestination that endowed you with a wholesome heritage of mind and body, with energy and perhaps exceptional gifts, with powers which have put you foremost in the race, and with soul qualities that have made you earnest servants of God. It was predestination, nothing but that. And, alas! there was predestination also in the thousands of crippled, disabled, and sin-born lives that know nothing better than the glare of the gin-palace and the reek of the slums. Election! it is the omnipresent thing, shining with golden glory and privilege over some, with a huge shadow of despair over others. And it would be well for all of us if, instead of forgetting and denying the thing, we thought more of it and felt it more, and grasped the divine side of it, and realised more profoundly the solemn and tremendous

obligations which it brings. If we were predestinated to nobler things, it was not for our own sakes chiefly, but for the sake of others. Every special gift imposes the burden of sacred duty and imperial pity. If we were called to faith and worship and godly endeavour, it was not that we should "sit and sing ourselves away to everlasting bliss," but that we should burden ourselves, as Christ did, with the sorrows, ills, and darkness of our fellow-men; that we should be conformed to the image of Him who loved and prayed for everyone, and fought life's battle, not for Himself, but for the world. It is *that* doctrine of election which the whole Church needs to bring back again and grasp with a firm, sweet, tender hand. That was St. Paul's thought: "Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren."

He called them out, says the Apostle, to be made like Christ, and then He justified them; and, finally, those whom He justified He also glorified. And if we were here to follow the old lines of thought we would have to talk about effectual and final calling, and justification by faith, and imputed righteousness, and complete sanctification, and the crowns of glory which are reserved for the elect. But I would rather get behind all that doctrinal phraseology to the simpler and far greater thoughts which were passing through the Apostle's mind. Surely he meant that the men who are formed in the image of Christ and called out to do the works of Christ are justified by God, though

the world perhaps does them no justice at all. Scant justice did the Lord of all get save from the Father who sent Him and the few disciples who believed in Him. He was tried at Pilate's bar and the world's bar, and convicted of madness, foolishness, and even crime. Scant justice did those who followed Him get from princes and rulers, and the blind multitude who were swayed by those rulers. We read often that they were denounced as madmen, hunted as criminals, despised, hated, and cast out as the offscouring of the earth. No wonder St. Paul fell back, as his Master had done, on the larger justification of unerring wisdom and love: "Whom He called, them He also justified."

I think that even now the truly called of God have to fall back upon that larger justification. The world does not bestow too much justice upon them. The men and women who are most like Christ in patience and faith and lowly, self-forgetting service are not, as a rule, the world's favourites. They are not dowered with popularity and praise; they are not generally called to fill the seats of honour. It is rather the clever, the intellectually gifted, the successful builders of their own fortunes, the men who push themselves to the front of wealth and fame, who are made the world's favourites and triumphantly justified. Those who walk by faith, and set their main affections on higher things, and live near the Man of Sorrows, bearing their burdens with His cheerfulness and spending themselves in humble ministries of love, are often thought a little foolish and a little

dreamy. They are sometimes pitied and occasionally even derided, and they are regarded as men and women who are deliberately missing and sacrificing the best things of life. The world does not justify them. They have to look higher for that—to Him whose judgment never errs and whose love never forgets: "Whom He called, them He also justified." And the end of it always is that those whom He justifies He also glorifies. It is no crowning with golden crowns and encircling the face with an aureola of splendid light—not that sort of poor material glory, but rather the bringing out and showing to all the world that which was hidden from it, and which God only has seen. It means the manifestation of qualities and lives which have been buried in obscurity, denied, rejected, and forgotten. It means that whom God justifies will, soon or late, be justified by all men, vindicated at the great trial scene, and shown in their real beauty. All faithful and Christ-like men have that wider justice done to them in time. Jesus, who was most of all despised, is now lifted above all names in acknowledged beauty, divinity, and goodness.

Every sufferer for righteousness, every holy martyr, every patient saint, every earnest life spent in tearful services and in works of love, is gradually revealed. They cannot be hidden always. They may be covered for awhile by prejudice and pride, calumny and rejection, but the soul that is beautiful in God's sight becomes beautiful at length in the eyes of all men. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.

He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday."

And so these words of St. Paul, which have been made to do such ill service by men who fought over the body and shell of them and lost the spirit —these words come again to us with all their sweet significance and present-day application: "Whom He predestinated, them He also called, and justified, and glorified."

CHAPTER XIV

TWO ESTIMATES OF FOOLISHNESS

"Let no man deceive himself: If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."—1 Cor. iii. 18, 19.

St. Paul touched a sensitive place when he talked in this way. If there was one thing which a Corinthian could not bear to have pricked it was his conceit in the matter of wisdom. To call that in question was the unpardonable insult. He was not particularly vain of his personal appearance, of his clothes, or his property; but he was always more than a little puffed up with intellectual pride. Of the two he would have much preferred an empty purse to a thinly furnished head, and he would almost rather be known as a criminal than be regarded as a fool. These words of St. Paul must have been like needles to him, unless he laughed them away as sheer stupidity. "If any man among you seemeth to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

I fancy we have all some part in the feelings of that Corinthian gentleman. We do not like to be thought exceptionally wicked, we shrink almost

more from being known as very poor; but I think, after all, the thing we dread most is being called fools. Many a man will violate any one of the Ten Commandments, or all of them, to escape that, and he will plunge over head and ears into folly in his anxiety to be thought clever and wise. We are always doing things we should not do, and leaving undone things we ought to do, because of that fear. It is such a terrible thing to hear somebody whisper, "He is a perfect fool." And yet it would help us a great deal if we could make up our minds to this, that we are liable to be charged with folly, whatever we do. If you have an idea that you can go through the world without being called a fool, dismiss it as soon as possible, for the thing cannot be accomplished. One half the world will always call the other half by that not very flattering name. Each man thinks his own way is best, and if you are taking some other way he will certainly call in question your wisdom, and probably have doubts about your sanity. *You* think that a young man is foolish who is sowing to the flesh, sowing the wild oats of sin to reap ruin and corruption. *You* more than think: you know it. But he is perfectly sure that you are the fool for sowing to that very unsubstantial thing called "the spirit." He thinks that you are expending time and energy to produce an airy nothing. There are scores of men in every town dawdling and lounging through the Sabbath day in their drawing-rooms, almost at their wits' end how to kill time and get through the tedious hours. It never occurs to you that they are particularly wise, and

yet they are flattering themselves all the time that they are not such simpletons as you, giving the hours up to dull religious services and to Christian work, which neither bring quiet to the mind nor puts money into the purse. And if you are in the habit of praying, there are people who smile with a knowing look of cleverness, and are very positive that, if you had your heads put on in the right way, you would not waste your time on that unprofitable business; whilst you are just as sure that the man who never prays is, as Tennyson says, "no better than a brute." You feel that if prayer were only a perchance, if there were only a bare possibility of prayer being heard and answered by an Almighty Helper, no thoughtful or sane man would throw away that chance. He thinks you are stupid for praying; but you are absolutely certain that he is blind and irrational who never prays. And thus, whatever course you take, some part of the world will throw this disagreeable word at you; and the best way is not to be over-anxious about it, but to take care, if you must be called fools, that you win the name in doing God's will, and not in the ways of the ungodly. For the first point on which the Apostle insists here is—

I. That there are two estimates of folly—God's estimate and the world's estimate; and these two are often as contrary as light and darkness. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." And if a man seems to be particularly wise in the eyes of the world the best thing he can do is to become a fool in men's eyes in order to be called wise by God. That is St. Paul's extreme way of

putting it, and it sounds extravagant. And yet it covers a profound and unquestionable truth. A man who is living for this world alone is not generally regarded as a fool, especially if he is moderately successful. The rich man in the parable, who was heaping up immense stores and goods, planning to build new barns wherein to bestow them, and calculating on an easeful, luxurious, and well-endowed old age, had not the slightest idea that there was any deficiency of sense in these proceedings. He was smart and thrifty, notably shrewd, with an eye on the main chances. It never occurred to him that anyone would regard him as a fool; and the probability is that all his neighbours applauded his prudence, sagacity, and judgment. Yet God, taking stock of this man's thoughts and conduct, applied this brief epithet to it, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." And perhaps the man himself, when the summons came to him, if he had a little time given for thought, would be somewhat of the same opinion, and feel that he had been pursuing a rather senseless business in making all that preparation for old age, and no preparation at all for what came after.

"The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." And, on the contrary, what seems to the world folly is often, in God's sight, the highest and divinest wisdom. St. Paul and his friends knew quite well what the generality of people thought about them. They were under no mistake. "We are fools for Christ's sake." Festus and Felix and Agrippa, and all of that class, regarded them as deranged, and it certainly did seem an absurdity

for any man deliberately to choose such a life as that which St. Paul lived—a man well born, well educated, with marvellous energy and exceptional intelligence. There were few positions in the Jewish nation, perhaps not a great number in the Roman Empire, to which he might not have aspired. He certainly had it in him to acquire great wealth and distinguished honours. Instead of that he preferred a career of obloquy, poverty, and continued hardships, with tears, stripes, and imprisonment at every step, with no money at the end, no reputation—only ignominy, a violent death, and an unknown grave. If such a man were found to-day three-fourths of the people would call him just what the world called St. Paul. It was only in God's eyes, *then*, that he was supremely wise. But now we *all* know that God's judgment was true. This man has a name that will endure for ever. It stands second in Christian history to the Master's name—a long way behind, yet second. He has influenced and shaped the thoughts of our progressive Western world more than any other person who was merely human. He has won a crown of eternal honour, and, if we had our choice, every one of us would a hundred times rather be a St. Paul, with all his sufferings, than the prosperous man of the parable of whom the Master's lips said "Thou fool."

Nay, was not the Blessed Lord Himself charged with madness by those who persecuted and crucified Him? His life, with its hunger, loneliness, and weariness, its high ideals and daily rejections, and its apparent utter failure at the last, seemed to that dark,

blinded world a senseless, aimless, insane infatuation. Yet now we declare that in Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And the world which called Him a fool adores Him to-day as divine.

And so you may well be advised not to be over-anxious to win a vulgar reputation for cleverness, smartness, prudence, and worldly wisdom, and not to fret your hearts away if coarse minds sometimes fling this name of "fool" at you. They are sure to do that if you tread in any of the real steps of Jesus. An honest life will not be always called wise; a life of purity will occasionally win cheap sneers. If you pursue great ideals, if you kneel often in prayer, if you spend your energies in self-denying labours, if you give freely to help your fellow-men, if you often lift your eyes from the dust toward the heavenly crown, if you seek God's "Well done!" rather than the praises of men, you are sure to be called by the baser sort, as all good men have been called—fools. Take it with a smile. Pin the name upon your breast as a mark of honour. For it is an honour to have that name given by those who have no greatness of soul. You are in the way of God's wisdom, and it is of infinitely more consequence, both now and hereafter, that you should not be deemed a fool by Him, whatever you are in the eyes of men. For what He thinks folly now all lips will call folly some time, and the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. The second thought which St. Paul gives us here is—

II. That a man is never wise until he feels

himself a fool, and just trusts in that higher wisdom which is not his own. "If any man seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." Some of us have learned that lesson by sad experience, and most of us might have learned it if we had had our eyes opened. We have made blunders enough through trusting to our own understanding and thinking ourselves sufficiently clever to make our way through the difficulties of life. Most of the mistakes into which we have been betrayed, most of the perplexing coils in which we have involved our feet, most of the unwise courses and unwise choices we have taken, and all the grievous sins which have left black spots on our memories, have been owed to the fact that we had far too great a conceit of our own powers, moral and intellectual. It never occurred to us that we were fools, and therefore we tumbled into folly. We went our own way, never stopping to ask if it was God's way, because we were sure that our wise heads could not judge wrongly. One may venture to say that, if in your past life you have taken some egregiously foolish step which you regret to this day, and will always regret, that step was taken with perfect satisfaction in your own judgment, and it never occurred to you to kneel down, hesitating and trembling at God's feet, confessing yourself a little child, and asking for light and guidance. We think we know so well, until we have fooled and fallen a few times; and some go on fooling and falling to the end, because nothing can convince them that they are

foolish; and nothing ever drives them out of their self-conceit to Him who is the Light of life. But some of us have had this grace given, to know that the human will is weak and the heart often prejudiced and darkened, that the most cultured mind cannot see a step before it, and the wisest mind stumbles unless God illumine, direct, and show the way. And we feel that we dare not take any important step in life until we have laid it before God in prayer. It is then that we become wise—then when we say:

> An infant crying in the night,
> An infant crying for the light;

"Show me Thy way, O Lord"; "Take Thou my hand and lead me." Then do we understand what St. Paul meant when he said, "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

And in the same way we have to become fools before we understand at all the mysteries of life. There are some people who think they know these mysteries; at least, know them so well as to sit in judgment upon them, and pronounce them impossible, contradictory, unreasonable, and untrue. They say that the Incarnation is too improbable a thing to be believed, and the world's redemption by a cross so extravagant as to be incredible. They cannot think that this world of sorrows and pain can be ruled by a merciful and fatherly heart, and they say that the idea of a particular providence is opposed to the ordinary facts of life, and that if God cared for each one,

and answered the prayers of each one, nine-tenths of the injustices and griefs which afflict the world would have no place. And they cannot see that there is any evidence in reason or fact for the belief in an after-life, with all its joys and solemnities. They fancy that they are wise enough to say that these things cannot be.

And we may at once admit that, if these things are to be dealt with by human wisdom, they are quite beyond us, and not things which we can readily believe. And, therefore, we just put aside the presumption that we can see and understand all that is to be seen. We kneel at the feet of Him whom we call Master, and say, "I am just a fool. I do not know anything about these things of myself, but I have trusted Thee once for all, and I believe that Thy words are true and faithful. I remember that all the best and bravest men that have lived in the world for some nineteen hundred years have just confessed their folly and ignorance in the same way, and through this very foolishness have been made wonderfully good, strong, and wise."

And if anyone tells me that I am a fool for believing these things, I answer, "That may be; but it is noble fooling. It brings me into the society of an innumerable company of noble saints and inspired fools, and it is the strength and joy and splendour of my life."

"Therefore, if any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

CHAPTER XV

THE OPENING OF THE EYES

"That the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened."—EPH. i. 18.

THIS is part of one of St. Paul's prayers. The whole prayer is lovely, like a cluster of jewels, and this is the central gem of it. He prays that they may have a clearer vision, a quicker understanding, that their faculties of apprehension may be sharpened, that their eyes may be washed clean from the dust and relieved from the veils which have darkened them, and that thus they may be able to see the great and good things of God. Now, surely, you say, this is a prayer for the unbelieving. He must be thinking of those to whom Christ has not been revealed. No, it is nothing of the kind. It is a prayer for the saints of Ephesus, for people who were walking in the sunlight of divine love. And if it was good for them, it is good for us, whether we be wise or foolish, and whether we have hardly taken a step in the Christian life, or, which is not very likely, we are high up in the climb to sainthood. I can think of hardly anything which we need more than to have "the eyes of our understanding

enlightened." And if you could quote to me all the most beautiful prayers that have ever been uttered, all the divinest liturgies that have ever been composed, I should be almost prepared to say there is not one of them better suited for us, better fitted to express the universal human need, than the simple, pathetic cry which a certain blind beggar by the wayside once sent up, "Lord, that mine eyes may be opened." Our Lord Jesus told His disciples that one great purpose of His mission to the world was to give men sight. "I am come that they which see not might see." And the Word of God throughout makes much of sight. It speaks of men as blind until the light of His revelation breaks upon them. It describes a wicked, godless age as a time in which there was no open vision. It calls all its prophets seers, and all its apostles and saints men who have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, and it promises all good things to the seeing eye and the hearing ear. There is no figure which better describes the change wrought in conversion than this—an illumination! a breaking-in of light! an unsealing of the vision before the great and beautiful realities of life! You have lived in your little world of selfish interests, small frivolities, narrow round of absorbing pleasures, petty cares, and vulgar ambitions. You have been shut in—you have seen nothing beyond, nothing greater than yourselves. Suddenly you are brought into the larger world of God and eternity—a world of imperial duties and solemn obligations, a world of immeasurable love, boundless hope, and un-

limited fellowships, a world in which life stretches out in breadth and depth and height beyond all limits, and all things are transfigured in the light of a new creation. Do you not say instinctively of yourself, then, "Whereas I was blind, now I see"? Yes, there is one miracle which Christ works unceasingly, world without end: "The blind receive their sight."

Truly, *the best thing that God can do for us is to open our eyes.* There is nothing which makes so much difference between one human life and another as the quality and degree of their powers of vision. It is the most precious of all gifts and endowments. It makes the artist, the poet, the prophet, the philanthropist. It is the amplest source of joy, of real wealth, and of blessed contentment. It is like the lifting up of the dull earth to the gateway of heaven's glory. Most men and women see very little, though they think, probably, they see all that is to be seen. They are like prison walls, with only narrow chinks to let in the innumerable rays of sunlit beauty which beat upon them. Other souls have large, clear windows in the walls, and the gleams and flashes from the encompassing world of truth and beauty stream in with copious flood. With them the lovely and the glorious things are always there: not unfelt, not invisible. How dull and blind we are when we deem ourselves most acute and sharp-sighted! The world is full of God, and we sometimes walk all day without finding a trace of Him. The air is all alive with the music of His love, and we hear no sound of it. The faces of noble men

and saintly women pass by us constantly in our daily walks, and we recognise them not in our intentness upon lower things. A thousand things in our daily path suggest to us thoughts too deep for tears, yet we move on without the faintest perception of them. My little child, nay! my little pet dog, humbles me, makes me ashamed of my own attainments, for the dog knows a tender-hearted, honest man sooner than I do, and the child finds a heaven in scenes where I am full of a weary discontent. What fools we are to call the children ignorant! The good things of God are revealed to the babes, and hidden from the wise and prudent.

It matters not where men are or what their surroundings if they have what the Bible calls the seeing eye. They will have a world of lovely and divine things about them. Plato said of his master Socrates that, when Socrates was put in prison, the prison ceased to be. The narrow cell expanded into a grand and richly illumined palace whose top reached the heavenly places. It was in the Athenian prison that he saw his noblest visions and spoke his grandest thoughts (about the soul and immortality and the life to come) and John Bunyan, in a common felon's gaol, had heaven all about him and saw delectable mountains, and lands of Beulah, and rivers of light across which stood the pinnacles of the City of God. It is the seeing power that gives to life its fulness, beauty, and sweet content. "A man is not rich because of the abundance of his possessions, the number of his servants, the wide circle of his flattering

admirers and friends, and he is not happy though he can purchase for himself all the delights of the sons of men. He is only rich in proportion as he has the faculty of vision. A millionaire may be poorer than a common tramp, because he is for the most part blind. We have all enough to make life brimful of joy if we can only see it. Joys! they are everywhere! we tread upon them, they lie like neglected flowers covering the path we walk. For all of us there is more of sunshine than shadow, more of plenty than want, more of beauty than ugliness, more of ecstasy than pain. Love abounds, and touches of God, and human affections, and sweet high thoughts, and hints of immortal things. There is far more always to be thankful for than to groan over. It is a Father's hand which has made the world and life, and He has made most things good in them if His children's eyes were but opened. Do you remember St. Paul's words: "Having nothing, yet possessing all things"? and again, "All things are yours"? Yes, if only, as he prays here, "the eyes of your understanding be enlightened." St. Paul was all the way through a richer and happier man than that Cæsar to whom he appealed, though Cæsar was master of the world and St. Paul owned nothing but his clothes. For he saw so much more! He saw an infinite creation in every man that he met, a world of possibilities in every child, raptures of love in every saint. He saw eternity in the background of every time-picture, and God's unchanging purpose writing golden lines of promise under every page of human sorrow and

sin. He saw heaven's rich colours transfiguring every earthly scene, and all things working together for good to them that love God. And therefore His life was full of joy, full to overflowing. "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, . . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

"That the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened." Yes, that is the prayer for all of us, if we would but believe it. It is written, many a time, of holy men of old that they saw visions of God; and we either do not credit that, or we think it belonged to an age of miracles. If a man were to stand up in the market-place and tell us that he had had a vision of God we should set him down as a lunatic. And when we read about the prophets seeing God in His holiness and hearing His words and walking consciously in His presence, the hard-headed man sets it down as a fantasy and delusion. We hardly believe it possible for any man to see things of God which are invisible to us. Yet the savage Indian will trace a path unerringly through trackless forests where we can see no guiding marks at all, and a simple mariner will read on the surface of the sea a thousand signs of rocks and shoals and deep waters beneath where our eyes see nothing but one monotonous colour. Their eyes have been opened by long intentness on this very thing. How mad we are to suppose that those whose lives were one long searching after God could not see and feel more of Him than we do!

If we longed for Him as much as they did, if we spent as many hours at His unseen feet, if we held ourselves in hours of silence listening for His voice, He would make Himself known and felt in a thousand sweet and unmistakable ways of which we have now no perception. It is because we seek Him so little that we find Him not, and that He is hidden from us in the crowd of common affairs. And do we not all miss a thousand joys, a thousand inspirations, a thousand hallowed suggestions and divine helps every day, because our eyes are dim, because the smoke and dust of the world are upon them? What do our depressions and despondencies mean, our irritabilities and complainings and weariness and thankless moods? Is it not that we are half blind to the unceasing approaches and visitations of God? blind to most of the sweet, pure, and good blessings which He drops upon us as He passes by? The glories of nature, think of the long catalogue of them, the exquisite delights of happy friendships, the noble thoughts and aspirations, the calls to duty, the thrilling hopes and sanctities of religion, the Providence that is so careful of us, the Divine Fatherhood which enfolds us in its gentle arms, the infinite love of Jesus which clasps us in a sweeter than motherly embrace, the promises which girdle our lives with unspeakable splendour, the assurance of immortality, the great future which is our inheritance, the mercy which heaps its forgiveness upon us, and the long-suffering which bears with us and is never worn out!

God is always seeking to make our lives full,

to show us all the bright and joyous things, and to awaken in us rapture and hope. And if life is scant and meagre and dull it is the fault of our own vision.

I would that we could all have our eyes more fully opened to the things we talk about in the sanctuary, that we could see with new, clear vision those greatest things of all which we constantly name but never understand: the glory and the dignity which we have in Christ; the splendour of our relationship to Him; the incomparable wonder and mystery of His cross and love; the unutterable sweetness of His salvation. We need, indeed, that His hands should be laid often on these eyes of ours, that His own beauty may become more to us; that we may read God's great thoughts concerning us with clearer understanding; that the good and pure and great things of life may be more attractive; that all dark and sorrowful things may appear with the light of His promise about them, and that we may see a Father's Presence at every step of our course. Now may "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and unveiling in the knowledge of Him, that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened."

CHAPTER XVI

THE HIGHER OPPORTUNISM

"I am become all things to all men, that I may by all means save some."—1 Cor. ix. 22.

There is one lesson which we have to learn before we can do any good in the world—nay, if we are to push our way through the world without stirring up animosities, making needless enemies, wounding and alienating friends, offending those whom we would like to conciliate, and more or less quarrelling with everyone we meet; and that one needed lesson is this that, though "God has made of one blood all nations of men," He has made no two men alike. There is a singular family likeness which proves that they all came originally from the same parent, whether that same parent was Adam or Adam's Maker, God; but, though they all have the same family likeness, there is not one whose portrait would do exactly for another, and especially if the portrait showed you the mind and not merely the face. The variety in human beings is the most wonderful thing in this world. We do not see things with the same eyes as another, or judge them with the same mind, or feel them with the same emotions. We are

not impressed by the same arguments, affected by the same appeals, driven by the same passions, or wrought upon by the same motives. There are certain things, indeed, which are common to all, certain things which all good men approve, and certain things which all except idiots believe; but beyond that there is a vast range of things on which we all feel differently, and concerning which we cannot judge another from our own experience.

You know what octaves are in music. There are seven of them on an ordinary piano. And most of us can hear every musical note which a piano sounds. But there are both higher and lower octaves which certain instruments and voices reach, and which many human ears cannot take in. Some can hear the higher notes, but not the lower, and with others it is the reverse. We all differ in the same way with regard to the things which impress us, catch hold of our imagination, appeal to the best and worst in us, and bring out our evil and our good. There are sermons preached in every sanctuary which move some to tears, stir them to impassioned devotion, and lift them up to the very gates of heaven. Yet when those very sermons have been preached you will hear others declaring that the preacher has been quite out of form, and that his words were wearying and unprofitable. And it by no means follows that they are not good and earnest Christian men. It only means that the preacher has been touching chords which are not found in them. And verily, the preacher who wishes to

move all sorts and conditions of men will vary his message to the varying needs; he will run over the whole scale of moral and religious things, sounding every Gospel note in turn, high and low, soft and strong, tender and fierce, pitiful and awful. He will "become all things to all men, that he may by all means save some."

I. You often hear it said that *the Bible is God's book for man.* It is, indeed, for this very reason: it is the one divine book in the world, and it is also the most intensely and thoroughly human book. It was written by all sorts and conditions of men, that it might appeal to all sorts and conditions. Think how varied were its authors, all inspired for this one work: men brought up in Pharaoh's Court, men who spent most of their lives in prison, men trained in the sheep-fold like David, men born to the purple like Solomon, statesmen like Isaiah, choristers like Asaph, poets and dreamers like Ezekiel, herdsmen and vine-dressers like the minor prophets, fishermen, tax-gatherers, and physicians like those who wrote the Gospels, Roman citizens like Paul, rich and poor, learned and unlearned. What a strange and varied society! God spoke through all these diverse lips, that He might make known His manifold wisdom to the manifold hearts of men. And when you turn over the Bible, you find that it appeals to every mood, touches every side of man's nature, fetches its illustrations from every field, and plays on every conceivable string and organ in the human heart. It is eloquent and homely, it soars high and descends low. It has stories and songs, sermons and fables,

philosophy for the wise, and almost baby lessons for the simple. It makes you weep, and it makes you laugh. Here it sparkles with humour, and there it is blood-red with pathos. It satirises and rebukes, it pleads with tears in its eyes, and it lashes with whips of scorpions. It is terrible in its anger and womanly in its pity. There is nothing in man which it does not find out, stir up, and provoke. It speaks to every man at the point where he is most susceptible. It is the wonderful work of God. There is nothing like it in the world. It is, in truth, the voice of One who "becomes all things to all men, that He may by all means save some."

II. Think of our Lord Jesus Christ: His ministry was a sort of *living epitome of the whole Bible.* He was the Bible incarnate, showing all its variety of methods and teaching in His own sweet deeds and gracious words. We read that He knew what was in man. He knew what was in every man before He was told. He read the secrets of each heart as if their bodies had been transparent glass, and as if their most hidden and silent thoughts had been expressed in words. And He handled all men differently, because He measured them so accurately and understood so perfectly their varied needs. He hardly ever treated two persons exactly in the same way. He whipped the greedy, sacrilegious merchants in the temple, He took the little children, like lambs, in His arms; He wept with the mourning sisters at the grave-side, He chided some other mourners for making so much ado; He poured forth a torrent of fiery invective against the

hypocrites, He let penitent harlots wash His feet with tears; He spoke to some about the worm which never dieth, and the fire that is not quenched, to others of the pitying love and forgiveness of God, which nothing can wear out. To those who despaired of themselves He said, "If you can believe, all things are possible"; to those who were over-confident He said, "Many that are first shall be last, and the last first." To the weary He offered rest, to the hungry He gave food, to the broken-hearted He whispered hope, to the jaded and worn He spoke of abundant life. The young He called to work, to the old He spoke of the life beyond. With the stubborn and impenitent He was angry, with the wise He reasoned, to the ignorant He talked like a mother. O that ministry! what a world of varied needs it covered! If it does not find you out, whatever you are, one may almost despair of you. It comes down to the level of everyone. He makes Himself the Saviour of everyone. He becomes "all things to all men, that He may by all means save some."

III. St. Paul had learned this lesson. He had learned it from the Master. He had learned it also from his own experience, from his failures and successes. And it helped to make him the mightiest of preachers and soul-winners for Jesus. He varied his message. He was like an organ that sends forth a thousand sounds, but one music; which plays as if there were fifty instruments in it, and not one, but all worked by the same powerful hand. To the Jew he said, "I am a Jew; my Master was a Jew; I believe in the law, as you do.

I tell you of One who came to fulfil the law." To the Roman he said, "I am a Roman; born a Roman citizen. I preach to you an Almighty Cæsar who came to save the world, and will one day rule all the world." To the slave he said, "I am a slave of Jesus Christ. I make known to you One who has no respect of persons, and before whom master and servant are equal." To the free man he said, "I am Christ's free man. I want to tell you of One whose service is perfect liberty." To the wise man he spoke: "In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." To the ignorant he said, "God hath chosen the foolish things to confound the wise." To the poor he declared, "Christ became poor, that we, through His poverty, might be made rich." To the rich he spoke of higher riches, even the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ. "All things to all men," that he might "by *all means save some.*" It was always with *that motive* in all the varying attitudes and voices which he assumed. It was not to please men, but to *save them*; not to win their favour and applause, but to win their souls.

IV. Take these words of St. Paul without the final words, and you rob them of all their beauty, reasonableness, and divinity. You take them out of God's service and enlist them in that of the Prince of Darkness. They have been quoted and used a thousand times, unworthily, falsely, and meanly. They are the boast of the time-server, the excuse of the coward, the argument of the unscrupulous, and the weapon of the unprincipled and the knave. They express a philosophy of life

which has no sense of honour, which finds no room for convictions, which sacrifices every higher thing for ease and gain. The politician becomes all things to all men, that he may by all means keep in power. The candidate for municipal or parliamentary honours promises all things to all men, that he may by all means secure votes. The writer in the Press echoes and flatters the thoughts and prejudices of his readers, that he may by all means promote the sale of his journal. The hunter of popularity beslavers all men with praise, that by all means he may get them to exalt him. The commercial man agrees in opinion with everyone with whom he has to do, that by all means he may secure orders. The preacher preaches to suit the tastes and requirements of his hearers, that by all means he may retain them and offend none. And the very Prince of Darkness puts on fifty different suits and faces, that he may make himself palatable and pleasing, and by all means catch some. A man makes himself an incarnate lie if he adopts this as his rule of life. One never knows what he is. We only know that he is constantly appearing what he is not. And, alas! we are all tempted to fall into the ways and repeat the sentiments of those into whose company we are thrown. We are afraid of being singular, and perhaps afraid of being thought disagreeable. We laugh with those who sneer at higher things, and we talk of them with respect and approval to those who believe in them. We show our best when we are with the best, and put on our worst when we are face to face with the worst. We acknowledge Christ

when Christ's people are around us; we deny Him in many ways when those who love Him not are in our presence. At least, *that is our temptation.* It is the sin which doth easily beset us, and against which we should ever be on our guard. We are to become all things to all men, not because we are cowards, but that we may by all means save some. St. Paul, with all the changes that he assumed, was ever intent upon the main thing. He put on many a dress, but the Christian soldier was seen through them all; he spoke with many voices, but the ring of the Master's words was in them all. Nobody ever mistook what he was and whom he served. Everyone felt that there was one motive operating in all that he did—the wish to commend the Master to men and by all means save some.

If you wish to do your Master's work and press your Master's claims, do not haggle about fads and prejudices, but get hold of great principles and urge them. Yield in a thousand little things, if necessary, that you may win the great thing. Do not insist upon your views and opinions, but insist upon the mighty matters of faith. Get men to believe in Jesus, and do not fret your heart to get them to believe in you. Do not be determined to make them good just after your pattern and notion of goodness. If you can only get them to accept Christ as their Master, that is the main thing, and the rest will follow. Do not suppose that everything which seems wrong to you must necessarily be wrong to them. Do not force your conscience upon them—they will be judged by their own consciences, not yours. Do not stake all your

influence on matters that are not vital; use it in bringing them to Christ's feet, and He will complete the work. So far as you are able, show that side of Christ to men which will appeal to them most forcibly. Tell young men and women that He wants them for good work and a noble life. Tell the old men that He will be with them, even to grey hairs. Tell the weary that there is rest in Him, and the sick that He is the great Healer. Tell big sinners that He died for their sins. Talk not to the broken-hearted about their sins, but about Him as their great Comforter. And there are some to whom you had better not talk religious things at all. They will only resent the talk. Try to prove to them what a Christian life is by living it. So you will " become all things to all men."

CHAPTER XVII

THE TRUE OPTIMISM

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." —ROM. viii. 28.

A PREACHER who takes this text ought to begin with a prayer and an apology. A prayer for light, and an apology for presuming to think that he can deal with it. He should, at least, be modest enough to know that its depths are beyond his fathoming, and all that he can attempt is just to touch it from the outside and offer some meagre hints as to its possible meaning.

We often quote the words, not so much because we believe them as because we would like to believe them. I envy the man who could announce them, as St. Paul did, with unhesitating, unquestioning conviction. His grand certainty really startles us, as well as the sweeping universality of the statement: "We *know* that *all* things work together for good to them that love God." If he had said "most things" we might have given a reluctant consent; but the *all things* puts a tremendous strain upon our faith. Everyone can run through his mind fifty exceptions. He can

tell of disagreeable things, offensive things, hurtful, immoral, soul-destroying, heart-breaking things, which work nothing but pain and mischief, whether to saint or sinner, and which no imagination can render helpful and beneficial. We are always hoping, if we are of a cheerful mood, that the affairs of our own lives, and the affairs of the world generally, are moving on to a more restful and golden day. But that is about as far as our faith goes when faith is at its best. We think that evil will at last be overcome by good, but it is hard to believe that evil itself will be used to perfect the good. Yet to this height of faith the Apostle bids us climb. That is the philosophical and religious certainty in which he rests: "We know that *all* things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose"; and I say, again, the thought is immensely difficult, and if we can get the faintest gleams of real light on this great mystery it is about as much as we can hope for.

I. Let us note, first, then, that this cheerful outlook of St. Paul was confined to the godly and the God-loving. He was a decided optimist, if we may use the word which has now become one of our stock terms and taken its place in the language of the streets; but his optimism was built up on morality and God. There are certain amiable dreamers who leave out that moral element. The philosophical optimist paints everything with gold and rose-colour. He thinks that everything is just as good as it can be in the best possible world. He thinks that what we call sin, and guilt, and strife, and

hatred are just a lower form of good; that wrong is right, and darkness light, and that all things are working to produce the greatest amount of happiness for everybody in some coming time. "Let things alone," he says, "and out of the hissing, roaring furnace of sin and trouble, pain and chaos, the pure gold will emerge and make all creatures rich." St. Paul's optimism was not an indolent, sentimental dream of that sort. He believed in the eternal distinction between wrong and right, between good and evil. He believed that there was a huge mass of sin in the world which was hateful to the Creator of the world, and which was producing nothing but misery and death for those who continued to indulge in it. Whether, as the poet says—

> Good may fall
> At last—far off—at last, to all,
> And every winter change to spring—

was a question which he either never asked himself or never attempted to answer. He was only sure that, for those who deliberately pursued the way of evil, there could be no peace and no fair outlook, but a fearful looking-for of judgment, while for the faithful, the righteous, and the God-loving the prospect was always bright. To them the golden future and the promises belonged. God was pledged to make all things their allies and helpers. That was St. Paul's optimism. Not that things would work in the best way for all, but for those only who set their faces Godward. "We know that all things work

together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

II. Further, when the Apostle declared that all things worked for good, he was thinking of good in God's sense of that word. Happiness is one thing, good is another and very different thing. Goodness, in the long-run, will no doubt bring in its turn perfect blessedness; it will bring unsullied and unmixed joy; but goodness is not happiness, goodness is not freedom from strife, care, and pain. If you think that all things work together to give the godly man all he desires, to deliver him from trial, trouble, worry, and distress, to make him prosperous, smiling, contented with everything about him, and unruffled in temper, person, and estate, you entirely misread these words, and you will in all probability be woefully disappointed. A great many people think that the chief end of life is to secure ease and happiness, and they say that the object of all our social and political endeavours should be to provide the greatest possible amount of happiness for the greatest number. That may be good utilitarianism, but it is not Christianity. It is not the divine idea. If this world had been mainly intended to make the people who live in it perfectly happy, we can only say that it has been constructed on wrong principles; we may even say that the Creator of it has committed a huge blunder. We can easily conceive of a world in which there would be a vast deal more happiness than there has ever been, or ever will be, in this. God had a higher purpose. He has a higher purpose with us. It

was to make the world a moral school, a training-place for character; a place in which patience might be learned, and righteousness and strength of soul, and Christ-likeness; a training-place which was to prepare for a better and fuller life hereafter. Those who are called after God's purpose are called for this—to be conformed to the image of Christ. And St. Paul was thinking of this end, and of this end only, when he used the words, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

III. And now, thirdly, if you bear this purpose in mind you will see at once that St. Paul's assertion is not so extravagant as it seems. In fact, it is not extravagant at all; it is borne out by the whole history of the world, and even by common experience. All things do work together to bring out and perfect the best in the God-loving men and women. It is not only the sorrow of the world, but the very sin of the world that disciplines and develops into goodness those who strive, and labour, and suffer with their faces up lifted towards God. It was that which made Christ—the Christ whom we know, the Christ whom we worship—the crown and flower of humanity, the altogether lovely. What Christ would have been in a world without sin we cannot imagine. He would have been a totally different being from the actual Christ, the Christ we have in mind. He, as we are told, was perfected by suffering. He was perfected by trial, temptation, opposition. We may almost say that He was perfected by the divinity which was

in Him and by the evil which surrounded Him. It was the suffering which brought out all His strength and patience. It was the fight with temptation and sin that revealed and proved His purity and unspotted holiness. It was the malice and hatred of men that drew forth His unlimited forbearance and forgiveness. It was the pains, miseries, and despairs of men that provoked His pity, tears, sympathy, compassion, and love. All that background of evil was needed to paint that living picture of everlasting beauty. There would have been no Christ for us at all without the sin and pain against which He did battle, and for which He bore the cross. The very worst things had their part in producing that perfect Image of the invisible God. All things worked together to make Him the Prince and Saviour of men and the joy of heaven and earth.

IV. And all things work together to produce the men and women who are most like Him. Really there would be no high types of goodness in the world without the sin and suffering which are elements in producing them. I do not know what goodness would be in a world in which all men were moderately good and fairly happy. It is beyond our conjecture. What we do know is that all the best men are developed in the fight with wrong, in the struggle against darkness, and in the wrestle with pain. Men are not made happy by these things, but they are made noble, long-suffering, brave, and God-like. There would be no beautiful lives, there would be no lives worth reading, were it not for the dark and evil things

against which they have valiantly contended, and which they have nobly overcome. Where would be the heroism of heroes and the patience of the saints, and the holy fire of martyrs, and the zeal of philanthropists, without the injustice and the wrongs, the oppressions, hatreds, and miseries which they have withstood or endured, and against which they have done battle? History would be a long, blank, dreary, vacant, monotonous record but for the good men who have been trained and perfected in the school of trial and in the conflict with the dark and hellish forces of the world. There is no pure gold without the blood-crimson setting, there is no glory without the cross. And even now the bad and distressing things in the world, and in our own lives, have the greatest part, next to the Spirit of God, in producing all that is best and most God-like in ourselves: the patience, the forbearance, the unselfish thought and care for others, the prayerfulness and trust in God, the strength to bear, the quenchless hope of better things, the pity, the sympathy, the kindliest tears, the dearest affections, the willingness to forgive. We should have none of these if there were no sinners to vex us, no oppositions to cross us, no pain in our cup, no suffering in the lives of those about us. You wish the world were vastly different from what it is; we all wish that. We wish that we and all the people around us were both better and happier men. Yet the world as it is, with all its sad and crooked things, makes the noblest possible lives for those who are not overcome by the evil of it, but who

use the sadness and the pain and the evil of it as Christ did, in doing the works of God. And that, I think, was mainly what St. Paul meant: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

V. And lastly, in thinking more especially of our own lives, we slowly learn, as we get older, that there is far more truth in this sublime philosophy of St. Paul than we first supposed. Things do work for good—sometimes for our lower good, and always for our highest good—things which seemed to be nothing but irritating, hurtful, and evil. The bitterest disappointments, the events which we called misfortunes, the failures of early life, the blows which struck down our favourite projects and hopes, and left them bleeding, dying, and dead, were not always—they were not often—what we feared and supposed at the time. We set our faces Godward. We determined to make the best of what was left. We took the strokes in the spirit of Christian men, and ere long we discovered that those things had not been enemies at all, but perhaps our best friends. They had turned our lives into a truer and more fruitful path, and made us both larger-hearted, wiser, and happier souls. We are always too ready to say that the things which happen are against us, because we do not see beyond to-day. When we get a little further on, if we keep to the right and godly way, we find out that those very things were *for* us. They have somehow been woven into the texture of our lives, not as ugly and disfiguring things, but in lines of grace and strength. They have

helped to make us the best that we are. And one may be sure of this, that if a man's heart is right with God; if he is not full of idolatry, covetousness, and the love of the world's coarser things; if he is a man of daily prayer; if he loves noble things and is set on doing them,—then everything which falls to his lot, whether it be pleasant or painful, whether it be a chaplet of honour or some heavy burden or bleeding cross, it will make him a truer, larger, more generous soul, humbler and wiser, more pitiful and more patient, and perhaps more worthy to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light. The crosses and ills of life do not lift that man up whose thoughts are coarse and downward. They sometimes kill all the bit of good that was in him.

But most things, if not all, work together for good to them that love God and know that God loves them.

PART III

ST. PAUL'S PICTURES OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BURDEN OF OUR EARTHLY TABERNACLE

"For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that the mortal part may be swallowed up of life."—2 Cor. v. 4.

In this sentence the Apostle speaks of our body under a double figure—as a tent which shelters us and as a garment which enfolds and clothes us. In Eastern lands, where tents are used, the same article serves the two purposes. When the sun is blazing at noonday the traveller fixes up his canvas-house, and sits under its shadow; when the night brings the chill winds and the cold dew he wraps the thing around him for warmth. But in any case the somewhat cumbrous bundle has to be carried day by day wherever he moves. And this suggests the present application of the figure. Our life in the flesh is a pilgrimage, a burdened and often weary pilgrimage, St. Paul says; groaning under the weight of the bodily house or vesture which it has to carry as it journeys on, ever toiling up the hill to its higher abode. The thinking and feeling life in us is immortal, yet cabined and chained in a mortal structure which sadly

fetters and hampers all its nobler endeavours. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened."

That, I venture to say, is a just and true picture of most human lives. Probably young people do not feel excessively the burden of the body, and are not disposed to groan heavily and constantly under the pressure of its imperfections. We can all remember the time when body, mind, and spirit felt as light and free as the air about us, when they harmonised together with hardly a jar, and we had no cause to find fault with any one of them, or to wish we had been differently made. But as life moves on some of the things which in youth were but a feather's-weight get loaded as if every stage of the journey had left its troublesome legacy, and we begin to feel like Jacob when he halted upon his thigh. And certainly to every one, be he young or old, who is striving after the godly life, and fighting any sort of moral and spiritual battle, the body is a vexatious encumbrance, a terribly difficult companion to walk with, and at times a puzzling mystery which almost drives us beside ourselves. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened."

I. We "groan" under it, says St. Paul, with a little shiver; and then adds, with a more palpable shiver, "not that we would be unclothed." It troubles him to have it, but it would trouble him more to be without it. He wishes he were rid of it, yet he cannot think of the parting. Sometimes he cries, "Who will deliver me from it?" but when his enemies propose to do that for him, he thanks

God that they have been frustrated, and that he is in the body still. You can understand these contradictory moods. We all have them in a measure. We continually scold the body and complain of it, but it is very much as a mother declares that some child will be the death of her; yet, propose to take the child away—what then? No! we do not wish to be released from it. "Better bear the ills we have than fly to others that we know not of." We speak hard things of it, yet cling to it with desperate eagerness and love. For, after all, it is a fair tabernacle, fearfully and wonderfully made. It is a piece of divine workmanship, far outstripping the highest results of human genius. It is the most exquisitely fashioned thing in the world, at least among visible things, the most curiously wrought. It is a whole creation shut up in a little space, a bundle of inextricable complications and awful mysteries. And we have always had it with us; we cannot think of ourselves without it. It is so woven with our intellectual, moral, and spiritual being that we cannot tell where one ends and the other begins. There is no dividing border-land. Soul and body are one, married in closer bonds than the truest wedding vows can make. No wonder that we, like St. Paul, have an instinctive shrinking from the separation. "Not that we would be unclothed."

II. And yet we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened. Especially if we want to get through a quantity of honest work. The spirit is always willing, whilst the flesh is constantly having its fits of weakness and weariness.

Especially if we wish to live pure lives, with nothing but clean and wholesome and beautiful thoughts; especially if we wish to be generous and just, even-tempered and cheerful, as becomes the children of light, and if we are the sort of men and women who aspire to the higher levels, and to show some faint resemblance to the Christ. The body plays sad tricks and works grievous havoc at times among these higher purposes. It is our servant, or ought to be, but it often takes the master's place, and it is the most despotic, whimsical, and foolish master that servant ever had. It makes us pipe to all its humours, and sometimes its humours are very bad. It changes with every wind, and drags us through all its variations. It takes a fit of sulkiness at times when duty requires most effort, and lo! our spirits become languid and flaccid. It goes out and takes cold, and sends us home with tempers almost brutal. It swallows indigestible food, and visits its folly upon the patient soul by filling it with ugly doubts, darkening creation and blotting out the face of God. Sometimes, when we begin to fancy that we are almost angels, it mocks us by sending a troop of ugly thoughts into our fair palace, and proving to us that we are still akin to the other thing, and occasionally it thrusts unclean things into our very devotions, as the old saints at their prayers used to see the devil's face leering in at them, or something very like it. Yes, it makes the endeavour after patience and purity and goodness very hard. It is constantly catching our heels and pulling us back

as we climb, or sitting heavily upon our shoulders like Sinbad's Old Man of the Sea, when the ascent is so steep that we need wings instead of that encumbrance, and there are times when we are almost foolish enough to wish that we could be taken to pieces and put together again with all the worst parts left out. We are fashioned divinely, with immortal longings and God-like aspirations; but oh! so strangely and with such a mixture! "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." What then? Well, just this, as St. Paul says—

III. That the great endeavour and end of every godly life is to get the weak, sinful, mortal part clothed upon with that which is stronger, spiritual, and immortal, and swallowed up in victory. The greater thoughts and feelings in us, the nobler spirit, the divinely given nature, are slowly to acquire a perfect mastery, and conquer that which is fickle and feeble, fleshly, sensual, and devilish. It is to be one long wrestling of prayer and faith against that lower self which, if indulged, becomes our deadliest enemy. People ask why we were made in such a way as to render this fight inevitable; why was the soul fastened to such an unruly yoke-fellow? And there are some scribblers with a little shallow cleverness, and much more irreverent self-conceit, who waste paper and ink in showing how differently they would have done if they had been God. It is an inestimable mercy for us that they never had the chance. We do not know the why, but I am humble and trustful enough to believe that God

had better and wiser reasons for this particular arrangement than we can imagine or guess. And, in any case, we must submit to the arrangement, and by His help make the best of it. The great thing is to believe that the weaknesses and sins and impatient humours and unruly passions of our mortal flesh can be slowly overcome by watchful prayer and earnest cultivation of the diviner spirit which He has given, and that it is not impossible, even with the load of this tabernacle upon us, to live a noble, patient, beautiful, and comparatively pure life. The worst thought that you can entertain, the most pernicious philosophy that you can lend yourself to, is that your mortal weaknesses and faults are an essential and ineradicable part of you which must always go with you, like the name you bear and the memories you carry, and that, in fact, you are in no real sense responsible for them. We hear far too much of this sickly stuff talked now. Our passions and tempers and animal appetites belong to us, it is said. They are inherited, they were born with us; Nature or God made us so, and therefore it is ridiculous to find fault with or try to change that which God made. Nay! whatever a man does, though he wades through a very slough of filth and flings his soul and honour away in shameful and criminal actions, he finds a weak sentimentalism ready to condone and pity and multiply excuses for him on the ground that his mind is unhinged, or that his body was constructed in such a diseased and crooked way that he could not do otherwise. Such maudlin sympathy as this strikes at the root

of all morality, and, if carried out consistently, would make the world a gilded asylum for the wrong-doer and a hell for everybody else.

IV. We are *responsible for the deeds done in the body*. The body is strong, but there is something which is stronger if it be incessantly cultivated. And if the one was made by God so was the other, that the fight, if honestly waged, might not be unequal. We should be far less troubled with the ill-humours and fretful despondencies, and sullen wearinesses and greedy passions of the body if from youth up we did our best to keep it simply healthy. If through all the earlier years of life we lived soberly, temperately, practising day by day a watchful self-restraint, we should not find the tabernacle half so burdensome and troublesome in after-years. To be sound in body makes it far easier to be cheerful and pure and healthy in heart and mind. And even if it has come to this, that you have a weak, frail, often ailing body, which trembles at every change of temperature, and is never quite equal to the work which it is asked to do, yet even then the brave and praying spirit can make a noble fight of it, and win unexpected victories, and do almost impossible things. I think of the Apostle who wrote these words, who groaned so often under the burden of this tabernacle, I think of him as one of the most striking instances in the world's history of grace magnifying itself in bodily weakness, and of a sanctified will proving its victorious power over fleshly encumbrances. This man had passions enough in his little body—unruly passions, as he

knew too well. Did he not call himself a wretched man because of the evil desires which struggled in him? He was as full of human nature as David, with big prides in him, and fierce tempers sometimes breaking out, and unclean things not quite dead and buried. You hear him saying, "I buffet down my body and bring it into subjection," and you can picture what that means. Yet did the might of God in him conquer that nature, and make it sweetly obedient, pure, and saintly.

Nay, more: it was a frail body. We know *that* by many a pathetic complaint and confession. It never enjoyed perfect health. It had always some thorn, some crippling inability. It was well acquainted with aches, pains, and tremblings. It was strung together with fragile threads. It was a bundle of sensitive nerves. Yet how fearless, unwearying, patient, joyful, strong, and mighty was the spirit in that feeble tabernacle! He worked for thirty years with unflagging devotion. He did the work of a giant—nay, ten giants. "In labours more abundant" than they all. No wonder that he wrote, "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, yet is not I, but Christ that liveth in me."

And we can all have that spiritual force which made St. Paul conqueror over fleshly, hindrances, trials. Faith is mightier than fears; God within us greater than all our tempers and desires. "In this tabernacle we groan, being burdened," but, "thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

CHAPTER XIX

THE JOY OF POSSESSION AND THE PAINS OF LONGING

"And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."—Rom. viii. 23.

The Apostle has been speaking of a universal travail. He has pictured the whole creation groaning and struggling in birth-throes, labouring to produce some higher life than it has yet known. He has represented the whole creation quivering with pain and impatience, as it feels its bondage and imperfections and moves wearily towards more perfect things. We know that this is profoundly true. What we call nature is never satisfied with its work. It is always bringing out of pain and death new forms of life. The human race is ever fretful with a large discontent, pursuing progress through paths of warfare and suffering. Nations move forward, goaded by incessant restlessness, to larger destinies, and each class and order of men have their feverish ambitions, sullen murmurings, or ardent hopes, ever longing for something that does not yet appear, ever in pangs because the hunger of their desires

is so much larger than their realisations. That is what St. Paul meant by the groaning and travailing of creation. Then follow the words which we have read, wherein he declares that the Christian life also has part in this experience. The Christian is a redeemed soul bound to an unredeemed body. He longs to soar, but is caged and fettered. He is risen from the dead, but cannot shake off his grave-clothes. He is thwarted in his endeavours, crippled in his aspirations, his feet clogged and chained, as he tearfully presses forward. Thus a profound sense of pain, struggle, and imperfection is interfused through his deepest and serenest joys. "Even we also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body." Now, nowhere can you find a truer picture of the life of faith than this—the life which is always sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; rich beyond measure, yet ever poor; which has found the secret of rest, yet is ever restless; which by its title-deeds possesses all things, yet in its actual life is absolute master of none; which is the most puzzling of contradictions, yet the grandest of facts.

St. Paul's words tell us of the joy of possession and the pains of longing, and I wish to emphasise these two aspects of the Christian life.

I. There is the joy of possession. "We have the first-fruits of the Spirit." We are already richer than words can tell, though there is ever a sort of tearful longing for something more and beyond. Men who know nothing about it say that the Christian life is all expectation—hope deferred, a

dreamy waiting for what the future may bring, and then, maybe, they quote the stale proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," and fancy they have said something wondrously wise. But, in fact, they have only exposed their own ignorance. In truth, *we hold* the bird in the hand just as surely as we hope for the two in the bush. We are not clutching at the shadow and losing the substance: we have a partial grip of the substance now. If we had nothing to tell you about Christian experience except that it feeds on predictions of good things to come, and that the light in its eyes is only the light of happy dreams all unrealised, we should have no great confidence in our message. Were all God's promises like bills dated forward indefinitely, and never accompanied by the sight and touch of real treasure, we might well be suspicious of the inheritance held in reserve for us. No! the proof that He will in due time pay everything which He has promised is furnished in the fact that He pays not a little now. "We have the first-fruits of the Spirit." The winter is past, and the time for the singing of birds is come. The soil has opened to the light and warmth of spring, and life is awakening everywhere to shake itself from the dust and put on garments of beauty. Always lovely are the first-fruits to the eyes which have grown weary with looking on the bare, hard features of winter. Sweet and welcome are the early snowdrops and the first primrose, and the tiny shoots of verdure and jewelled buds which glisten like opening eyes on the grim skeleton branches. They are like the first streaks of morning after a long night

of pain, or as the first morsel of food to an invalid after long fasting. Precious in themselves are the first-fruits, and more precious still because they come laden with glad prophecies. Every modest violet that peeps under the hedgerows is throbbing with the same large life of nature which will erewhile carpet the earth with splendours. It bears, written on its leaves, a sort of divine promise of all the glories which are to come. "We have the first-fruits of the Spirit." St. Paul could hardly have chosen a more exquisitely beautiful and true figure of the Christian life than this. The colours of the Christian life are delicate, but they are of God's painting; its leaves are feeble and trembling, but they pulsate with the very divine life. The chill winds blow around it, and the clammy soil holds it down, and its growth is slow, but it has verily risen from the dead and feels in all its veins the motions of eternal love and joy. The Apostles are for ever assuring us that we have the earnest of our inheritance, the first instalment of the treasure which is to be ours in full; or, changing the figure, they speak of a banquet of which we have already the foretaste, or they tell us that now are we the children of God, immature and undeveloped, but having within us all the germs and beginnings which will expand into the heavenly life and the perfect man. They always glory in that which is now as well as in that which is to come, and when scornful men ask, "Where are the signs of your present wealth and blessedness?" they answer, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart to conceive the

things which God hath prepared far those who love Him. But God hath revealed them to us by His Spirit." Yes, we have got our cluster of grapes from the Promised Land that we may taste thereof and know the wealth of it. Heaven will show us nothing but what we have hints and dim visions of already. Are there not hours amid the turmoil and fever of your lives when you feel almost as perfectly at rest in the goodness and fatherly care of the Lord as if you already beheld His face? Do you not often feel that the joy of being loved by Him is better than all that the world can give? Do you not often say in your deepest hearts,

> Nor know we anything so fair
> As is the smile upon Thy face?

You feel the blessedness of being in a world which, with all its sin and sorrow, is a portion of the Father's house. You rejoice in every virtue you have gained, in every fight with temptation you have won, in every thought of truth and purity which you have made your own. You know something of the sweet approval of conscience, something of the ecstasy of doing good; you know a little of what it is to love even as Christ loved. You have large and happy fellowships, you have a share in God's sympathies and thoughts, you have the strength and help of prayer. Your heaviest burdens have an Almighty Arm underneath them, your profoundest sorrows are set in the sunlight of hope, and your sins and failures are covered by

an infinite forgiveness. All this is yours now, yours in assured possession. "We have the first-fruits of the Spirit." But alongside that are—

II. The pains of longing. For the fact that we have seen Christ and had a vision of life in its highest form makes us impatient and dissatisfied with the imperfect, broken life which is ours now. In one of the old Greek stories we read that men who had once heard Apollo, the master, singing never heard their own voices again with pleasure, but henceforth sang with an underlying wail of confession that their music was but discord compared with that. Give a man a taste and glimpse of the highest life, and you make him weary and discontented with all that falls below it. That groaning and travailing of creation of which the Apostle speaks is felt chiefly by the strongest and best part of creation. The lowest members of the human family, the lowest nations, which have never seen and known the wider and nobler possibilities of life, seem to fall asleep in dull content. There is no pain and travail with them, because they have seen nothing to awaken aspiration. It is the progressive nations which have already reached far forward in human development that are ever groaning with a noble dissatisfaction, and filled with intense aspirations after something better. The least knowledge of Christianity, the dimmest vision of the Christ, seems to give a nation a spirit of unrest, a spirit of struggle toward happier and higher things. And so it is with individuals. Let human life settle down in the ruts and slough of ignorance, sin, and

blindness, never having known anything better, and it seems to lose all consciousness of its miseries and to drop entirely the wings of hope and endeavour. But give it a taste of the upland breezes, give it the least bit of experience of the mountain-tops, and the greater happiness of which man is capable, and never again will it lie dull and asleep and contented with its old condition. It will be filled with the pains of longing.

Thus it is by the very elevations of the Christian life, by the clearness of its visions, and the gladness of its heavenly hours, that it is made conscious of its weakness and want, its defects and remaining bondage, and filled with a painful longing to be free, to rise higher, to be completely redeemed. When you read the lives of the Apostles, and find them so full of heroic courage, of uncomplaining patience, of almost virgin purity and self-forgetting love, you are tempted to think that manhood showed its highest types there; that the Divine Spirit had conferred on them the very fulness of His power and grace. Yet these are the very men who confess, "We have only the first-fruits of the Spirit." Nay, they speak as if they had not yet realised sonship; they cry out, indeed, as if they were in intolerable bondage, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" It was because they had seen the Christ so clearly, because they had tasted so much of the highest human and divine life, that they kept on sighing evermore for the full possession of it. And so shall we if we have had the same sort of experience. The man who moves confined in the

shallow ruts of a Christian profession, who has never been lifted into heavenly places with Christ Jesus, will feel none of that painful impatience with himself of which the Apostle testifies. He who has had none of the profound joys and splendid moral victories of the Christian life will feel none of its pains and humiliations. He will never feel its bonds, because he has not touched its liberties; it is the more earnest Christians who feel that. In proportion to our present advancement do we know the pains of progress. You who have the richest experience of God's Fatherhood, and the fullest share in the workings of Christ's Spirit, who have already the most mastery over the body, and its lusts, the world and its temptations; you who pray most, love most, rejoice most,—you are the people who will be for ever fretting and reproaching yourselves because of the hardness of heart, and selfish passions, and un-Christlike qualities which are still part of your mortal environment.

In fact, the higher the Christian life reaches the more it will suffer from the pangs of a holy discontent. The better you are serving Christ the more intensely will you grieve because you are serving Him so indifferently. The ideal grows larger as life climbs higher, and the more we attain the more we are unsatisfied.

Do not think you are losing ground, that you are falling back, because you have a deepening consciousness of sin, imperfection, and unworthiness; because you feel that your life drops so far behind your prayers; because at times you

almost blush to hear yourself called a follower of Jesus Christ; and because every step forward is so hard to gain. It is rather a proof that you have seen the height more clearly, and have a deeper sense of what you ought to be. It is rather a proof that the Spirit of God is working more mightily in you and spurring you on through the pains of discontent to the deeper and better things which He has prepared. For the more we feel the possible magnificence of the Christian life the less we shall be contented with its meagre beginnings. We have the first-fruits of the Spirit—*only that*; and we groan within ourselves, waiting and travailing in pain until the harvest comes.

CHAPTER XX

AN EPISTLE OF CHRIST

"Ye are manifestly declared to be an epistle of Christ."—2 Cor. iii. 3.

"An Epistle of Christ? a letter of Christ? There is no such thing in existence," you say; and you are right, if you confine the word to its literal meaning. We never hear of Christ writing a letter, and we know that He never wrote a book, though He has prompted and inspired other men to write thousands of them. Once only in the Gospels do we hear of Him writing at all, and then it was not with a pen. He stooped down and wrote upon the ground with His finger, and nobody will ever know on this side the grave what words His finger imprinted there. The one thing which He wrote is lost. The world has thought it a strange thing that He whose words were worth more than all treasures never committed any of them to parchment or paper. He, the greatest preacher and teacher that the world has known, never used a note or left a scrap of manuscript. But it was not needed. He knew that His words would not be forgotten. For He wrote them on the hearts of disciples who loved and worshipped

Him, who treasured all His sayings as finer than the finest gold, and whose memories were wonderfully inspired and sharpened so that they let nothing slip which it was good for the world to have. Jesus wrote nothing; we sometimes wish He had. You would travel a long way to see a *bona fide* piece of Christ's penmanship. If such a thing were on exhibition in any old church or museum thousands of people would go half round the world to view it. A rag of faded old parchment with the very signature of Jesus upon it would sell for countless gold. And I think, if you had it, no millionaire could offer enough to draw it from you. A genuine letter of Christ! What a stir it would make in the world! And yet, here is St. Paul telling us that letters of Christ do exist, and are to be found and read, without any journeying or searching in museums—letters of Christ, "written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God." He has, in fact, been writing letters of this kind ever since that hour when He breathed upon the disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." He is writing them now. You may find them in every Christian assembly; some of them are to be seen in your homes, and in most large business places and factories there is sure to be one or, happily, more than one.

But it is certain that Jesus never ceases to write letters of the kind that St. Paul speaks of here. These letters are always coming fresh from His hands, and they furnish the best of all proofs that He is alive for evermore. You never receive letters from a dead man. If you see words

written and signed in the well-known hand and dated only yesterday, you are sure that the friend who sent them is alive, or was then. And Christ has been giving that witness of Himself through all the centuries. The Christians of Corinth were freshly written letters of Christ; the real Christians of London or Leicester are the same to-day. Every true Christian is a new proof of Christ's Resurrection. For nothing less than a risen and living Christ could make one.

I. In what senses are Christian men and women epistles of Christ? Think what is the object of a letter, if it be an honest letter. I say an honest letter; for a great many letters are written to flatter and deceive; they are full of false professions. But an honest letter is intended to convey the thoughts and mind of the writer. And if it is carefully written it does show the mind of the writer, better even than his speech. When you read the biography of some good or great man, you always find, as in the life of Dr. Arnold or of Gladstone, a large number of private letters included, because those letters help to show you the man's real character better than anything else could. Thomas Carlyle gave us the best account of Oliver Cromwell's mind and character which has ever appeared in print. Yet Carlyle's book is made up chiefly of Cromwell's own letters, with comments thereon. The sincere letters of a man are the faithful portrait of the man; they represent him to you. Now, is it possible for Christians to represent Christ in that way? St. Paul says, "Yes! The believers of Corinth

were doing it." What! those people, with all their contentions, rivalries, parties, and lamentable defects? Yes, those people. They were by no means a perfect Church. They were by no means clean and spotless reflectors of the Master's face. Nevertheless, they stood out in such marked contrast to the unbelievers around them, their general bearing had so much of the temper and spirit of Christ, that St. Paul could point to them as to an open letter, and say, "Read that; the mind of Christ is there. *There* is the plain handwriting of the living Lord." Most truly, then, you can be letters of Christ, though you are not immaculate saints, though you are conscious of innumerable imperfections and infirmities. A writer who wishes very much to send a message can make use of very poor and unlikely material if it is the best he has: half a leaf torn from a book, or a bit of rag; a broken pen, or a pointed stick; ink as thin as water, or as thick as mud. And yet he will manage to convey his thoughts. Many have done that. And Christ can use us in the same way. We are not the best material, not quite like superfine cream-laid notepaper; we are more like bits of stained, blotted, and torn waste-paper. Yet Christ will manage to write on us if we will let Him. You can show His patience by your own patience; and His endurance and cross-bearing by your own cheerful cross-bearing. You can show a faint copy of His gentleness and sympathy and forgiveness and self-forgetting by your own. You can manifest a little of His glory by your own gracious deeds and speech. In a

word, you can be so different, in temper and conduct, from the people around you as to make it certain that the mind of Christ is expressing itself through your mind, and you can thus be manifestly an epistle of Christ.

II. Now, observe that these letters of which St. Paul speaks are conscious letters. They feel and know themselves, first, all that they convey to others; they are written, not on unfeeling paper or wax, but on fleshy tables of the heart, on feeling and understanding hearts. We have to feel and *know* ourselves the things of Christ before we can convey them to others. That is the peculiarity of these letters. The little packet or sealed epistle which the post brings you is a dead thing. It knows nothing of its own contents, nor does the postman know. It may be bringing you agony or rapture, but he has no part in either feeling. But when Christ uses us as letters He makes the letters themselves thrill and burn and glow with feeling before they can communicate any of it to others. You can only show and give out to your fellow-men, to your friends and children, just as much of Christ as you have made your own. It must be your very own in its sweetness and beauty and power before others will take it from you. People sometimes try to teach religion to others when they have not felt its quickenings in their own hearts. Preachers, in too many Churches, set themselves to preach Christian truth when it has got no vital hold on them. It is their function and profession to do it. They always make a pitiable failure of the business. In

a great deal of the talk which you hear about religious education it is stupidly assumed that anyone can teach religious things if he has first committed them to memory. And so he can, in a way, very much as a parrot or a talking-machine might do it. He can teach children to repeat mechanically the, to them, meaningless words of a creed or catechism. He can teach the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, and the Sermon on the Mount very much as he would teach the multiplication-table, without distinct appreciation of their spiritual beauty. And such teaching is, perhaps, little better than none at all. But to show *Christ* to a man or a child, to make Christ and Christ's words alive and quickening to another, *that* can only be done by one who is throbbing, quivering, and almost burning with the ineffable sweetness, compassion, and love of Christ. We all know instinctively whether a man is repeating good things from memory or speaking them from his heart and soul. And the one is a dead thing, and the other a live thing. Get Jesus Himself breathing, speaking, inspiring, gladdening, in your own hearts, then you can teach Him, then you are bound to show Him to others. You can no more help showing Him then than the sun can shine without being seen. He writes Himself upon the fleshy tables of the heart, and then we become, as St. Paul says, "manifestly an epistle of Christ."

III. One thing more. The letters of which we read here are *living letters*, newly written. That is what gives them their power: not letters written long ago, but written now. The ink on them is

hardly dry, the paper is quite fresh. As you read them you can almost feel the breath of the writer on your cheeks. You can well-nigh touch His hand. The letters that move us most are from living friends. Sometimes we fall upon letters whose writers have been long dead, good and noble letters of great men, distinguished authors and statesmen, and we are always interested in them; but they never move us in the same way and in the same degree as the living letters which the post brings us from some mother, child, or friend who is absent. No, when we press them to our lips it is almost as if we were kissing the faces of those who sent them, and we can all but hear their voices, though they are hundreds of miles away. A living letter is a sort of telephone which bridges over distances. So when Christ writes His mind upon the hearts and lives which are moving about us at this present time, when He shows His qualities and His graces in you and me and other persons, He appeals to men and to the world far more powerfully than He can by old letters. The Christian life which you are living to-day, if it be any degree worthy, will stir men's hearts far more deeply than anything which St. Augustine, or Luther, Wesley, Spurgeon, and other great preachers and saints wrote. Nay, the very Bible itself, and its prophecies, Gospels, and Epistles, are to most men like the beautiful dead letters—wonderful things, sacred things, but rather old and faded, speaking rather of what was once than of what is now. Very few people are convinced that Christ is alive for evermore by merely reading

the Evangels and Epistles. It is when they see actual men and women in the flesh whose lives are a good deal like the Evangels and Epistles, when they see men and women whose lives are like newly written letters of Christ, then they begin to believe that there is a divine power at the back of all this. They say, then, "Yes! the Bible must be true, and Christ is verily alive and doing His great works as He did in the olden time."

It is mainly in this way that souls are won to the faith, and brought into the service of Jesus. They see Him in the faces and conduct of downright earnest and beautiful Christians, and that slowly draws them to Him. A little child that loves Jesus in an irreligious home will often do more to make that home religious than ten thousand tracts would do. A gentle, Christ-like girl in a factory or shop will sometimes do more to spread Christian influences in that particular place than all the Churches and all the street-preaching in a city. And a mother's sweet life, breathing out purity, kindness, and unselfish love, will prevail more than the mightiest eloquence which rings from pulpits.

Indeed, in these days we have almost too much street-preaching and church-preaching, and too little of the sermons without words which St. Paul is speaking of here. Men who are anxious to get souls converted and brought to Christ think that the only way in which it can be done is to talk Christ and preach Christ, and to be for ever preaching and talking. I myself have had a large share of that to do, and I trust, in God's mercy, it has not been all in vain. The world would be

poorly off without Christian preaching; but the other thing is more effective—to show Christ in your lives. And if you can be a real letter of Jesus Christ, you need not fret because you cannot be a great talker. You need not be ambitious to stand up in the streets or on a platform with a congregation or a crowd at your feet. You are doing a work which will probably have quite as big a place as that in the Lamb's Book of Life.

CHAPTER XXI

ST. PAUL'S UNIVERSALS

"Be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man: but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men."—1 THESS. v. 14, 15.

THE first thing which strikes us here is the universal and indiscriminating sweep of the injunction. St. Paul liked the word *all*; it suited his big heart. It was in accord with the grand comprehensiveness of the Gospel. In fact, he had learned it from the Master. It was just the echo of Christ's "Whosoever." He allows no exceptions. He says, "Be patient toward all," "Do good to all," "In all things give thanks." We hear the ring of such words through the whole of his Epistles. He often groups a number of these universals together, as in the words before us—as if he would say, "The promises are good for all needs, the injunctions are fitted for all circumstances, the rules apply to every possible case." He knew how fond we all are of making exceptions, how ready we are to say, "Oh yes, that is an admirable precept generally, but it will not work and fit in here." And once we begin to make exceptions it is like the little rift in the lute

which, slowly widening, marreth all. It is like the one little rent in the garment which tends to grow bigger until the garment is past mending. Your exceptions speedily become the rule. If you find one case to which your Christian principles do not apply, you will quickly find a second, and a third, and fifty more, until all your Christian principles are thrown over, bag and baggage. If God's Word is good for anything it is good for everything. The Master's orders are thorough, not meant to be obeyed only when it is agreeable and convenient to obey them, but also when it is not agreeable, when it goes against the grain. And they are the Master's orders which St. Paul gives us here, though he puts them in his own words. I take three of them; they will be quite sufficient, and more than sufficient, for our brief talk.

I. We are to be patient and forbearing with all men. That is a large demand; it is about the greatest demand which can be made upon human nature—yes, even Christian human nature. You will probably say it is beyond human nature in its unsanctified state. There are few of us who get through a month or a week without saying, "I have no patience with that man or that woman," or perhaps that child, and we think that we are justified in losing patience with them. "They are exceptions, to which the Christian rule does not apply. They would spoil the temper of a saint," you say; "they would wear out Job's patience." And you are right—Job's patience has been greatly overrated. If you have no more

than that, you will fall a long way short of St. Paul's injunction. It needs the spirit of Him who endured the contradiction of sinners to be patient toward all men. It is very hard to be patient with obstinate and self-willed and unteachable people; with ignorant and foolish people, who are wise in their own conceit; with easeful, lazy, self-indulgent people; with people who are always irritating you by saying and doing the wrong thing; with people who repeatedly commit the same faults and neglect the same duties; with people who constantly misunderstand and misjudge us, and people who will not see what is for their good, and refuse to be convinced of what is clear as the noonday. And there are always enough of such people about to make life a bed of nettles unless we have learned to bear, unless we have been baptized into the long-suffering and gentleness of our patient Lord. "Be patient toward all." You say, "Ah, but that man is so provoking; he is so incorrigibly stupid and such a fool!" Well, a wise man bears with fools. It is only when he is a good deal of a fool himself that he cannot tolerate them. It is of no use scolding a man because he is stupid. He deserves your pity rather. To get into a furious temper with him because he has not your intelligence is no great proof of wisdom; it rather proves that an intelligent man may be very stupid at times. If you pride yourself on being clever and sharp-witted it should make you generous towards those who have not been endowed in that particular way. "We that are strong ought

to bear the infirmities of the weak." If God gave you ten talents it was certainly to make you bear and suffer a great deal from the man who has only one. The more gifted a man is the more he ought to practise this: "Be patient toward all." Some of you, possibly, have almost abandoned hope of better things concerning some one person with whom you have had much to do. It may be one of your own children. He is so determined in his own way, and always in the wrong way, so stubborn and unbendable. Well, let patience have its perfect work. I should not be surprised to hear that he is what people vulgarly call "a chip of the old block." There was doubtless a bit of that same iron stubbornness in you before God melted your heart. The child is often just the father over again, as the father was before divine grace softened and changed him. Be patient with your child, your son, as God was with you, and he will probably turn out just as well as you have done, and perhaps a little better. The hard, granite-like stuff often makes the best man, and even the best Christian. I should think that Saul of Tarsus, when he was a boy, gave his mother a great deal of trouble. He was not the sort of youth who was likely to die of early piety. He was not moulded into a good shape as easily as a piece of wax. I know that, before his conversion, he gave the Lord Jesus a good deal of trouble; but he was worth it. He became all the mightier, as an Apostle, because he had been so unyielding as a boy. It may be like that with some who almost drive you desperate.

Hope on, still pray without ceasing, and "be patient toward all." Carry this patience into your Christian work; you can do nothing without it there. You have been trying for weeks and months to get a saving hold on some particular man, to rescue and lift him up; and he defeats your purpose again and again. He is so willing and yet so weak; he vows, promises, takes pledges, and quickly breaks them. To-day you have him on his better side, and he is all remorse and tears; and to-morrow drink, or the devil, has got him on the other side, and down he goes into the slough again. It makes you angry, it makes you desperate. "Very well," you say, "let him go his own way." "No," says Christ, "have patience." Think what an awful fight it is for him. You have never had his awful struggles and severe temptations. You do not know what a legion of devils are pulling and tugging at him. Follow him up, give him another chance, and another; forgive him seventy times. The seventieth time will do it. It is patience that wins, and patience is mightier than very hell; and when your patience is failing, remember the infinite patience which has borne with this foolish, mad, thankless, guilty world for thousands of years; remember the divine long-suffering, which has clung lovingly to you through the freaks and follies and miserable shortcomings of years. Bethink you how you have tried the patience of your Master, Christ, and it will help you to "be patient toward all."

II. The second injunction is twin sister to the first. Show goodness to all, as God sends His rain

and sunshine to all, whether they be evil or good. The face which you carry about is a Christian face, and that Christian face is to be shown to all —*no other* face. You are not to show a hard and unloving face because you are dealing with hard and unloving people. Our lives are not to be like looking-glasses, giving back the image that falls upon them; they are to show the features of Jesus towards all people. It is not to be "tit for tat," measure for measure, giving back as good as we get or as bad, paying with the same coin we receive, whether it may be bad coin or true. It is not to be the law of retaliation, hitting back every time you are hit. That philosophy appeals to the fighting instincts of men, and may capture an audience on a political platform; but it is hardly the sort of teaching which was given in Judæ long ago. We are to give back, not what is worst in others, but what is best in ourselves. We are not to cut off our noses to spite our faces because they do it. "See that none render evil for evil to any man." You are not to forget that you are a Christian because other people treat you in an unchristian way. They *may* do it, because they are not actuated by Christian motives; but you cannot do it to them without setting your Christian principles at nought. If people throw mud at you, or sneer, or slander, it is a great temptation to hurl back mud at them. But why should you stoop to that unclean work because they like it? Mud thrown at you can be easily washed off, but the mud which you fling sticks, not to the other person, but to yourself. It is stupid to give back what

you get: that is the rule of dogs who answer snarl by snarl. What is the good of answering a fool according to his folly? Why should you make two fools when there need only be one? If a friend loses his temper and calls you all sorts of ill names, why should you spoil your temper and descend to his level? If he does you a mean, spiteful turn, and you remember that you owe him something, pray do not forget that you owe yourself more. The shabbiest action done to us furnishes no justification for doing another shabby action in return. That is only multiplying one by two. You may say he right well deserves it, and probably he does, but why should you forget your self-respect because he is destitute of that commodity? You hear that a man has spoken a number of ill things of you, exaggerated and untrue, and straightway you dig up from memory unpleasant things which you have heard of him, and report them. But what is that but tarring yourself with the same foul brush? Because he tramples on truthfulness and charity, are you to stamp your feet on them also? Because he has a spiteful nature, are you to fill your soul with venom and vinegar? You want to pay him back? Yes, probably you can make him *feel*. You can sting and hurt him a little; but you hurt yourself far more. And really, the most effective and cutting way of paying him is to show that you have a soul above all these things. If we are Christians we cannot afford to degrade ourselves by copying the ways of unchristian men. The laws of their lives are not to rule ours. We have a dignity to maintain, and a conscience to keep

clean. "See that none render evil for evil unto any man."

III. And the third injunction is: Act Christianity wherever you go, and among all sorts of people. Follow good among yourselves, your fellow-Christians, and among all men. The moral surroundings are to make no difference to us. We are not to let our company change our attitude and temper. Our Christian professions are to stand good in every place, and the rules we have learned from Christ to be binding on us in every society. That is a great and difficult thing. It is most difficult to carry the feelings of the sanctuary into the workshop and the streets, and to be in the presence of the worst people what we try to be in the presence of the best. It is easy to fall into the language and thoughts of those about us. It is easy to yield like clay; it is hard to resist like rock. We want to be sociable and companionable, we want to please and not make ourselves disagreeable. And then comes the temptation to a weak and cowardly and even wretched conformity. I often tremble for those who have to spend their week-day lives in factories and other places where Christians are scarce, where unbelief and scoffing at religion abound, and perhaps profanity and lewd speech. To be always Christians there is no child's play. It is more like the grim struggle of faith's giants and saints in dark places. To walk on a high level *there* with undefiled speech and thought, to answer scorners' words with silence, or patient gentleness, to be as living epistles of Christ—this is hard work enough, impossible save

to those who are strengthened with all might by His Spirit in the inner man. And it is to get that strengthening that you come to the house of prayer; it is for that you take part in the memorial feast of the Lord. There He renews your faith and courage by the most inspiring of memories, and girds you again for the battle by the most cheery assurances. May all of us who need it most—and who is there that does not need?—get that help again this day.

CHAPTER XXII

THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

"This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. . . . But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."—GAL. v. 16, 22, 23.

THERE were two contending parties among these Galatian Christians, both of whom needed plain, straight words of warning and rebuke. There were the ritualists, who wished to make Christian faith a bit of patchwork or ornament stuck on to the Mosaic system, and who asserted that the keeping of the law and all its ceremonies was indispensable to salvation; and there were those who called themselves the spiritual party, who dispensed with all the Mosaic observances, flung off even the moral law, and claimed that Christian liberty allowed a man to do whatsoever he pleased. There was not much practical Christianity in either party. One made outward forms of supreme importance and pushed Christian virtues out, and the other, in its lofty claim of spirituality, ignored the Ten Commandments and sundry other elementary things. And they were wrangling and snarling and denouncing each other with genuine sectarian bitter-

ness, as if they had never heard of the love, gentleness, and meekness of Christ. Against all this St. Paul pleaded in the Epistle. The greater part of it was directed against the ritualists, but the words of the text were addressed to the other party, the spiritual men, as they called themselves. They had made great use of this word "spiritual." They had used it as a sort of shibboleth, or catchword, and flung it in the faces of their opponents. They do not seem to have known very clearly what it meant, but it had been a favourite word of their teacher, St. Paul, and it implied something mystical, supernatural, and divine, something grand and superior, something that placed them above everybody else in discernment and favour with God. And here St. Paul lets them down from their loftiness, from their vague talk about the superiority of the spiritual man, and tells them that to walk in the Spirit is just to live a sweet, humble, loving Christian life, and to put forth the fruits of faith and righteousness. "It is nothing less," he says, "than gross self-deception to call yourselves spiritual if the lusts, desires, passions, and envies of the flesh have free play in you. The Spirit of God has no place where these things are. They are the offspring of the carnal, devilish mind. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness. Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

And these words may well suggest to us thoughts for Whit-Sunday. We are reminded to-day of the spiritual life, and the divine Author of it; we are reminded of the coming of the Holy Ghost, and of

the grace, virtue, and power which He gave to those who received Him. We are reminded to-day that it is the abiding presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church and in the heart of each believer that makes the Christian life. The Christian life is something far more than morality: it is the planting of the divine life in man, it is the infusion of another and spiritual nature; and St. Paul tells us here how that spiritual nature is shown and proved. He brings us to this simple test, which I wish briefly to emphasise.

I. That it is known by its fruits. It is never an easy thing to define spirituality or to say who is the spiritual man. They are phrases which we often use, and sometimes use without any clear and definite meaning. Every Christian is told that he ought to be more spiritual, every Christian congregation is exhorted to be more spiritual. We frequently complain that a Church lacks spirituality, or that a certain type of preaching is marked by spirituality, or marked by the want of it; but if we were asked to say what we mean we should be somewhat at a loss for words. Indeed we cannot define it, we cannot explain it. The spiritual life in man is, and ever has been, and ever must be, a mystery. We know its source. It comes from God; it is the effect of God's Spirit working in the heart of man; but how it comes and how it works we know not. You can no more understand how the divine life plants itself in the earthy, sensuous nature of man and brings forth fruits which are of heaven than you can understand how the vitalising forces of nature change winter's

deadness into the verdure, beauty, and splendour of spring-time and summer. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh nor whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." You cannot tell how God joins Himself to the human soul and produces in what is naturally selfish, proud, pleasure-loving, greedy, and covetous the graces and feelings which are the very opposite of all these. It is of no use discussing the philosophy of it; it passeth understanding. The Apostle simply fastens us down to this: that it is known by its results. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness," and the rest. We are not on doubtful ground there. The spiritual man is one in whom the lusts of the flesh are held down by a higher power, who no longer loves with all the burning passion of his nature the things that can be seen, touched, and tasted, the things of the senses and appetite, the glitter, show, and gains of the material world, but who loves best and desires most what Christ loved—goodness, purity, soul-beauty, and likeness to God. The spiritual man has the mind of Christ. He is the soul of gentleness. He is patient toward all, forgiving and forbearing toward all. He is not always pushing forward himself and his own views, but full of graceful yielding and self-forgetting. The goodness which is in him is always flowing forth. He is brave to bear; he is long-suffering in trial; he loves, pities, sympathises with all. He shows Christ in all His actions, attitudes, and thoughts. *That* is St. Paul's beautiful picture of

the spiritual man. *That*, and *that* only, is what we understand, and what we should understand, by the spiritual life. We speak of a religious meeting as being intensely spiritual. We speak of a sermon as pre-eminently spiritual. They only deserve that name when they have made us forget for the time everything that belongs to sense and selfish interests, and the envies, ambitions, and gains of the lower world; when they have made us for the time despise all these things and lifted us into that region where Jesus is enthroned, and where the love of Him and everything that He loves has become all in all. We speak often of a spiritual Church, and there, again, a Church only deserves that name when there are no parties in it, no classes, when humility and dear brotherhood bring all together, when love breaks down all distinctions, bridges over all gulfs, and makes blessed peace, when forbearance and meekness and charity pervade the atmosphere like perfume from heaven, and the name of Jesus is exalted above everything that belongs to the self within and the world outside. That is spirituality; there is no other. By its fruits shall ye know it. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith." Further, we may say—

II. Where these fruits are the Spirit of God is. We sometimes say, with our short-sighted and foolish limitations, that the Spirit of God never works except in those who have believed exactly in our way. We say, "They must have been convicted and regenerated, and brought into the acceptance of certain articles of belief, before they

can have any part in the spiritual helps which God gives." But we only show our ignorant presumption when we talk in that way. God refuses to be bound down by our little plans and schemes. The heart of the Eternal is larger than all the creeds. And though He only gives His Spirit in all its fulness and power to those who cling to Christ in earnest faith, He does not withhold it altogether from others. We insult the Holy Spirit by claiming Him all for ourselves, by confining Him to our orthodoxy. Every right, pure, and noble thought comes from Him. All Christ-like virtues spring from the same Father's bosom in which the Christ Himself was begotten. "Every good and perfect gift cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning." Take care that you do not sin against the Holy Ghost by calling *His* works carnal. The Holy Ghost broods over the hearts of all, and is for ever producing in the most unlikely places some faint images of Himself. Wherever these fruits are the Spirit is. Where you find in men and women something that is far higher than the sensual and animal; where there is courage and self-forgetfulness, and patience in sorrow, and compassion and tenderness towards others, and pure thoughts and striving after nobler things, *there* you may be sure that God has not left Himself without witness. These are the gifts of His good Spirit; they cannot come from any other. No more can all these graces grow where God is not than grapes can grow on thorn-bushes and figs on thistles. The fruits of the Spirit are

these, and only the Spirit can produce them—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, and goodness.

III. It is only where these fruits of the Spirit are that there is any real understanding of divine things. St. Paul is always claiming for the spiritual man superior discernments, claiming for him the power of judging all things, claiming for him joys which are unknown to others. But this power is not a thing of the intellect: it is a perception of the heart. It is where love, long-suffering, and gentleness are found that the things of God are understood. It is only to these that God tells any of His secrets. You cannot prove to yourself or to others the simple fact of the existence of God, much less the supremely good, loving, and tender character of God, by logic and arguments drawn from nature, and arguments which appeal to reason only. You can only prove these things from the love, goodness, pity, and compassion which are in your own heart. What learned doctor or master of eloquence ever demonstrated to a single doubting mind the Fatherhood and infinite pity of our great Creator? It is never proved in that way, by force of reasoning; no, it is the deeper volume of the heart's own cries which proves that. It is the pathetic tenderness and pity shed abroad by Christ in our own nature that help us to know and believe that. When we become a little more meek and gentle towards others, when we find compassions welling up in us like those of Christ, when we are full of forgiving thoughts, pitiful and kindly thoughts, towards all, then we know, and cannot doubt, the everlasting

kindness, long-suffering, and pity of our heavenly Father. He speaks to us of Himself through the things in ourselves which are likest Him and which He has created there.

So with immortality. It has never been proved to the intellect. Philosophy has striven in vain, for thousands of years, to demonstrate it through the mind. It does not come in that way. But when our own hearts have realised the power of human love in its best forms, realised how love can hold on for a lifetime and bear all things, and be as strong when death comes as at the beginning, when we discover that all the best things in us are independent of bodily waste and decay—then the proof is given, and we understand how God does not intend to let us die, and can never let us die. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him"; but He makes them known to those who have the fruits of the Spirit.

And to-day we are reminded again of all these things. We are reminded that there is something supernatural in the life of faith, that everyone may have a portion of the Divine Spirit who honestly desires it and asks for it, and that we who kneel at Jesus' feet and call Him Lord may have it in great abundance. We are not dependent on natural forces, mental forces, or human forces; we have not to fight our battle with sin and temptation, and bear our burdens and difficulties with our single and unaided strength. The Spirit of the Almighty is about us, underneath us, and within us. The very power which gave Jesus His

uniform victory over sin, guilt, and sorrow, was bequeathed to us. It lives and works in us again, as it lived and wrought in Him, and wherever it is enjoyed it brings peace, self-mastery, and all other fruits of the Spirit. May Christ, as in the olden time, breathe upon us again this day, that we may receive the Holy Ghost!

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WITNESS OF THE LIFE

"That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke . . . holding forth the word of life."—PHIL. ii. 15, 16.

You can hardly read one chapter in St. Paul's letters without coming to a sentence of this kind, to some prayer or hope expressed that those who called themselves Christians might order their lives in such a pure and blameless way as to disarm the criticism of the unbeliever. St. Paul watched over those young Churches with the anxious interest of a mother. When he heard of their moral failures and backslidings, it was like a sword-stroke; when he received testimonies of patient continuance and unstained conduct, it was like a vision of the better land. He was far more concerned about quality than quantity; not the *number* of converts, but their moral weight, character, and Christ-likeness, and he often confessed, as he does here, that his labour would be thrown away, and the very sacrifice of Christ in vain, if they did not result in a company of men and women who proved, by their manifest and undeniable superiority to the world around, that the Spirit of the Master had shaped them. St. Paul was reasonably anxious. The world was

watching these early disciples, as disciples have never been watched since; watching them with keen, unfriendly, and malevolent eyes. They were conspicuous by their singularity, by their avoidance of temple and theatre, by their claims to a higher life. They were like a city set on a hill. Daily they came under a fire of criticism, of criticism eager to discover dark spots and flaws. Constantly they were on their trial before the world's cold and merciless judgment-seat, and every proved weakness and failing was fastened, not on them only, but on the Master whose name they bore. And, no doubt, there were a few noble-minded unbelievers who watched them with a kinder interest, who were really wishful to know, for their own guidance, whether this new faith did or did not produce a higher type of men. Thus were these Christians scanned and waylaid, their religion judged, and the Lord Himself judged, by their character and life. Well might the Apostle, jealous over them with a godly jealousy, entreat them often in such words as these: "That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke . . . holding forth the word of life." You will see, then, that St. Paul is enforcing here the very truth which his Divine Master and ours had continually taught—

I. That Christianity is to be proved, preached, and defended by the life. The disciple is to be as his Master—a Christ on a smaller scale. He was the Light of the world; they also are to shine as lights in the world. He is called *the Word* of God, and each one of them is to be, by his walk

and conduct, a word of God. They are all to be copies of Him, reproductions of his beauty; lesser incarnations of God, as He was the great Incarnation, so that the world, in beholding them, shall always be reminded of the invisible Christ. St. Paul was only repeating here the words with which our Lord Himself has made us familiar. He defined discipleship by the words "salt" and "light." Each of His followers was to be a centre of illumination, a moral fountain, a well-spring of sweetness, a savour of life and health to the multitude around. They were to form a moral aristocracy. Their righteousness was to exceed all the recognised righteousness of the times. Their purity and justice, charity and patience, were to be distinctly higher than anything else which could be found in the world or had been known in the past. His purpose was to produce in His immediate followers, and to perpetuate in the Church when He had departed, a stronger, nobler, and lovelier type of manhood than the world had heretofore seen, and by means of this to convince the world of His divine authority and power. The world was to believe that He had risen from the dead by witnessing the exalted lives of His followers, and their moral and spiritual qualities were to be the one sufficient proof that His saving and sanctifying power abideth for ever. That was the grand idea in the Master's mind. His religion was to win its way, not so much by the perfection of its doctrines as by the radiance of its purity; not so much by the energy of its defenders as by the meekness of its professors; not

so much by the eloquence of its preachers as by the speechless beauty of the lives that it produced; not by the awe of its terrors and the allurements of its promises, but by the manifest superiority of its ethical results, by the serene majesty of its courage, patience, self-mastery, and strength. For there is no doctrine which the world will not dispute, no argument or miracle which the sceptical mind will not question, no terror which wickedness will not defy, no promise which sensuality will not despise. But wherever there are brave, gentle, lovely, unspotted lives of fairer temper and spirit than the world can produce, scepticism is dumb and doubt half believes and frivolity stops and thinks, and the slumbering conscience is stirred and says to itself, "Verily this is of God." And, truly, Christianity has held its ground and won its way mainly by this. Its supernatural and divine claims have been proved by its moral fruits. Some men will tell you that the Church is maintained from one age to another chiefly by its organisations, its priests, temples, and preachers, its sacramental machinery, its able apologists, its officially regulated succession of Apostles. Christ would tell you, No! All these things are of small weight, some of them only a dead weight. The Church survives for ever because He Himself is in it, multiplying fair images of Himself, creating an unfailing succession of beautiful souls worthy to bear His name, making, as the Apostle says, "Sons of God, blameless and harmless, and without rebuke . . . holding forth the word of life."

II. The whole power of present-day Christianity, and of the Church, is in its blameless, witnessing lives. The Church, in this land at least, owes all the noble and mighty influence which it enjoys to the ethical superiority of its members. By virtue of this its influence is great over the host of people outside it, and this compels even those who are hostile to speak of it with respect. They say that its evidences are defective, that all its arguments can be refuted, that its sacred oracles yield to careful criticism; but they can neither deny nor explain the wonderful fact that goodness, purity, righteousness, and self-sacrifice are for ever and still for ever reproduced when its beliefs are held and the name of Jesus loved. None but the most prejudiced and embittered unbelievers ever venture to deny these greatest of miracles—that Christ and faith in Christ have still the power to create beautiful lives, and a multitude of them. There are scores and hundreds of thousands of people in all the Churches and denominations of this land who, in every feature of character, in sobriety and purity of conduct, in human love and sympathy, in lofty tone and temper, are unmistakably the salt of the community and the elect of the earth. No doubt there is a considerable sprinkling of goodness outside the Churches, but the great mass of goodness is within them. The pitiful, compassionate, generous, and pure-hearted lives are mainly found there. We often hear, indeed, from scornful or thoughtless lips the charge that Christian people are no better than others; that in business they are no more just, and in the

race for wealth no more scrupulous; that in social intercourse they are no more kindly, and in public life no more conscientious — in fact, that their professions are hypocrisy, and their claim to moral superiority is an imposture. You hear that continually, but the people who say it hardly believe it; and certainly the world generally does not believe it. The great majority of the irreligious have, in their deepest hearts, a conviction that there is a goodness in Christian men and women which is rarely found elsewhere. They may fling ridicule upon them in the light and profane talk of the factory; they may delight in throwing mud at this and that professor, and sneering at the whole tribe of Christian teachers; but they know well to whom to turn for public services, for unselfish benevolence, for disinterested labour. They know well to whom they must appeal when dark days come, when sickness and suffering are at their doors. They know in whose hearts sympathy beats with most freshness, and kindness and pity well forth. It is to Christian men and women that suffering and want constantly appeal, for in that quarter alone is the appeal sure of an answer. And it is just as unmistakably true that to bear the Christian name and be known as a Christian is to command trust. It is a certificate of honesty, integrity, and honour. The trust is sometimes betrayed. Men will occasionally use Christ's name for dishonest and infamous purposes; yet the trust is given by thousands and thousands of people who would hardly call themselves Christians. And men would not give it, and continue to give it, if

it were not in the vast majority of instances deserved. It is still the goodness and moral beauty of Christian men and women that give the Church its place and power in this land. I repeat, in this land. There are parts of the Catholic Continent where a widespread revolt of terrible hatred of the Church is going on. In Spain, Portugal, Austria, France, we read daily that the mass of artizans and city life are rising up with indignation to fling off the priest, the Jesuit, the Church, and all their doings. It is not a revolt against religion, but loathing and scorn of a Church which has become immoral and a cloak for immorality. Honest, clean-living men say, perhaps unfairly, "We must remain outside this Church if we would remain honest; for this Church, instead of making for goodness, excuses, forgives, cloaks, and encourages all impurity and vileness." That may be an unjust charge; but every Church will become a stench in men's nostrils when its fruits are not health but corruption, just because the very opposite is expected from it. Thank God for all that we have of clean and sweet Christianity, undefiled by lewd priests and confessional-boxes, and for all who are maintaining the influence of the faith by the witness of blameless and harmless conduct, "holding forth the word of life."

III. Let us each one be earnest in applying this truth to himself. Remember that the faith which we love, which is all in all to us, which we want to spread everywhere, can only be maintained and advanced by the proof which we furnish in our own lives of its purifying, elevating, sanctifying power.

The worst enemies of Jesus Christ are not those without, but those within. He is wounded, as the prophet says, in the house of His friends, by those who bear His name and have none of His Spirit; those whose thoughts move on a low level, whose actions are vulgar and selfish, whose aims and ambitions are coarse, whose tempers are harsh and overbearing, whose habitual conduct is hardly one whit superior to that of the world around them. There are, alas! hundreds of such men and women scattered about among the greater host of true, faithful, and beloved—men who obtain a place in the Church to which their conduct gives them no right, who go forth into the world labelled as Christians, only to bring ridicule and contempt upon the Name. And they are the most grievous and formidable hindrances to the progress of our religion.

You talk about the foes of Christianity in this land, and the forces of evil which arrest its way. They are not nearly so much to be feared as the people who attend church and live lives in the world that have hardly one touch of Christian sweetness, patience, charity, forbearance, and beauty. One of these does more harm to the cause of Jesus Christ than fifty of the sinners outside. If there is any weakness and paralysis in the Church it comes from them. God save us, whether we preach in the pulpit or worship in the pews, from destroying Christ's power in that way, and dragging our hallowed professions through the dirt. We, too, are watched, only less vigilantly than the early Christians. Fifty voices repeat, and

pass on with a smile, every word we utter and every action we do that are unworthy of the Name, and any one of us may give occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, or even prevent a soul from coming to Christ. Remember that the dear Name, and even honour, of the blessed Lord are committed to us. The world judges Him, and the faith of Him, by those who bear His name. There is no darkness in us which does not cast a shadow over His face, no imperfection, uncharity, or ugly temper in us which is not, in a measure, flung back on Him. By every unchristian act which Christians do they put Him to open shame. They make the world say, "Christ has no power in these people. Christ is only a dead theory in these people." And, therefore, may the good Lord who died for us help us to live for Him, "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke . . . holding forth the word of life."

CHAPTER XXIV

PEACE IN WARFARE

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."—PHIL. iv. 7.
"Let us put on the armour of light."—ROM. xiii. 12.

ONE of the saintliest of men was accosted by an earnest, but perhaps not over-judicious, evangelist with the words, "Have you found peace, my brother?" The answer was given in a moment. "No, my brother, I have found war." They were both looking at the same Christian life, but viewing it from different angles. In the grand experience of faith we are always seeking peace and praying for it. Sometimes, in the more blessed moments, we find it. Yet we never fail to find war as well. We are never allowed to put off the armour of light.

That Bible which is our text-book and manual of devotion is mainly a military book. People who are content to think of nothing but peace must leave out or skip over by far the greater part of it. In all its earlier pages, through histories, psalms, and even prophecies, we seem to hear continually the clang of trumpets, the clash of arms, and the rustling of banners. There is always the promise of a coming rest and peace, but the promise tarries,

and is never fulfilled. The later portions of the Bible show us the battle-field again, though the warfare has assumed a nobler and purer form. The Epistles are almost as military in their language as the stories of Joshua and David. They speak of helmets and shields, swords and spears, of the conflict against principalities and powers, the world, the flesh, and the devil, and the book well-nigh winds up in the Apocalypse to the sound of battle with dragons, and Antichrists, and Satan let loose to torment the world until he is held in chains for ever. It is only in the Gospels that the war-sounds cease. I say cease—no, we catch distant echoes of them there when Jesus says, "I came not to send peace upon the earth, but a sword." But the language of the Gospels is almost entirely of the other kind. "Peace" was the word which lingered on the lips of Him who spake as never man spake. Peace was the boon which He enjoyed, the promise which He brought, the gift which He imparted to His disciples and bequeathed to all His followers. The noise of battle is hushed around His person, and where He walks there is a heavenly truce, and the air is quiet as a restful sleep. But no sooner are His disciples left to carry on the work than the din of conflict is heard again, and the rest to which He called men has been changed into the good fight of faith. And that is the twofold picture of the Christian life which St. Paul gives us in these two texts: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"; "Let us put on the armour of light."

I. We are assured that in the life of faith there is the possibility of a great rest. God makes us partners with Him in the mystery of His peace. St. Paul is always telling us of the two great things in God which we know and yet cannot know, which in their vastness rise above our comprehension, yet stoop down to enfold us in their blessedness. The love of God and the peace of God: who can understand them or measure them? What plummet can sound their depths? What eye can read their secrets? What language can express them? Human thought breaks down on the outermost rim of these divine mysteries. And yet He has revealed them to us in a measure, and, better still, He brings us into the realisation of them.

The peace of God passeth all understanding. The changeless, untroubled calm of the Almighty is a bewildering puzzle to every finite mind. It seems inconsistent with the weary, troubled, ever-restless world which His eyes behold and His power governs. If He were outside all the evil turmoil and vexation of things we might comprehend it. If he were like the Epicurean deities, sipping nectar in some far-off heaven, and heedless of the moans and pains of mortal men, we might explain to ourselves His peace. But how can He be the God of pity and yet have perfect peace? How can He be a kindly Father and yet possess Himself in unbroken serenity? How can He survey with absolute quietness of mind the things which are going on even to-day in this poor, burdened, trembling world of ours? The wrongs unredressed, the injustices which cry out for vengeance, the

rising and revolts of misgoverned nations, the seething disaffections, the crimes, assassinations, and conflicts, the sorrows and heartbreak in the private lives of those who love Him! What an awful panorama is spread before His eyes continually! And yet there is peace where He dwells. Verily, it passeth understanding. And yet it is not altogether beyond us. We reach it through Christ Jesus. He has shown us a picture of it in that fair and fearless life. The Man of Sorrows, at least, knew that incomprehensible divine peace. He carried it about with Him as God's proof-mark of His divinity. If we wished to single out His one distinguishing superhuman feature, we should say it was that His life was a centre of peace in a world of storms—a heaven of restful thought in a bedlam of strife and sin. There was no worry, no feverish haste, no fretful anxiety. It was ever the same, no matter where or when, whether surrounded by the excited crowd or kneeling in lonely prayer, talking with friends or confronted with foes, in the quiet of Bethany or amid the rabble of Jerusalem, standing before the mocking Herod, receiving the traitor's kiss, or hearing the wild shout "Crucify Him!" Whether loved or hated followed or deserted, rejoicing or sorrowing, rejected, despised, forsaken, mocked, and defeated, there was always the same wonderful calm, the face unmarked by fear, the voice which betrayed no inward strife, the heart which the world's shakings could not move. For He knew that all things were going well, though they seemed to go so ill. He knew that an Almighty Purpose pursued

its way through all human disturbances. He knew that God's thoughts and God's love would be victors in the end. He knew that the future belonged to Him and to the Father in whose name He spoke. He knew that the wrath and sin of man were but as the white-foamed breakers that rage and roll around the steadfast rock. That was the peace of God which passeth understanding. The mystery of it remains; yet we know that it has once been incarnate on the earth, and that He who felt it Himself can impart the secret to us. He does, in a measure, impart the secret to all who walk with Him in the communion of trustful thought and prayerful love. He gave it, in their wrestle, to His disciples; He gave it to St. Paul in His bonds and distresses; He has given it to thousands who have endured shame and hatred for His sake, and surely there are some of us to whom it is not altogether strange. There are moments, and perhaps hours, in our lives when we are hidden in some quiet resting-place from all our prevalent fears, disquietudes, and alarms, when we have no anxious forebodings of to-morrow and no haunting memories of the past, when we say to ourselves concerning the great world's, broils, ambitions, and wild heavings, "The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoice"; and say, concerning our own fears, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We feel that there is a careful, all-regarding providence over mortal affairs, a wisdom that never halts, a foresight that never forgets, a love that never fails. We place our trembling hands upon an immovable throne, and become ourselves im-

movable. We look into the face of the strong Son of God. We feel His touch, we hear His voice, we drink in His promises, and there steals into our hearts His own serenity. The words of St. Paul are fulfilled: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

II. We are told that everyone who finds this peace finds also war. "Let us put on the armour of light." There is for every man of God an earthly foretaste of the heavenly rest; yet every man of God must speak also in this wise: "Talk not to me of rest here below. I am a soldier of the great King, and the resting-time comes only when the battle is over, and the eternal Sabbath begins." In this world of unrighteousness there can be no truce for those who are on the Lord's side; there can only be peace within and fightings without. There is rest in knowing that all things are working together for good to them that love God; there is rest in knowing that the thoughts of the Almighty are being slowly worked out; there is rest in believing that "through the ages one unceasing purpose runs"; there is rest in the assurance that evil will be steadily overcome; that the forces of God are mightier than all the devil's armoury and craft. Yes, that is the peace which passeth all understanding. But you may misinterpret all that to settle down into the easy, good-natured optimism which declares that everything is as it ought to be; that it is perfectly useless for us to waste our strength in pottering and mending what God has made, and that a higher power will bring

all things right in the end without our meddlesome interference. That is *not* the peace of God: it is the ignoble slumber of the fatalist and predestinarian; it is the self-indulgent paradox of the faithless dreamer. There is no peace of that kind for any man who has the soul of goodness in him, or the least sentiment of pity for human woes, or the least glimmering knowledge of the love of God and the mind of Christ. There can be no rest for the Church until the last stronghold is conquered and the last foot of land possessed. God never gives His peace except to fighting men. It comes, not to end the battle, but to those who are in the battle. The reason that so many of us rarely, or never, enjoy God's peace, is that we are taking no part in the Christian warfare against the wrongs, and unbelief, and devilry which are in God's world. Let them alone, and the very love of God will desert you, and His peace will follow it. We always despair of the world's evil so long as we are striking no blows against it. The perfect day seems to shift farther off to those who idly watch for its coming and have no share in the wrestling for it. It is the man who works, and prays, and flings himself into the battle, who sees with his eyes God working, and believes in his deepest heart in the fulfilment of all the visions which tarry. To him alone the peace of God is revealed, because he puts on the armour of light. There has been no man in modern times who enjoyed more of the peace of God than that man who was martyred at Khartoum—General Gordon. He never knew fear; he never hesitated in presence

of the most terrible dangers. He was like one wrapped round and bathed in the mighty protecting love of God; yet all his life was spent in warfare. Wherever he saw wrong done, iniquity, oppression, cruelty, misgovernment, there he hurried to find his battle-field, to strike for God and the right. Someone has told the story of his life in the words, "One man against fearful odds, but with God always on his side." That was the secret of his wonderful peace. It came to him because the sword of the Spirit was in his hands, and around him the armour of truth and light. The peace of God will either never come to you or never remain with you unless you are in some sort a soldier of faith, doing battle against your own sins, or the sins of others, or both. Some of us have the utmost confidence in God's power to keep us from falling; we believe that the evil in us will be slowly overcome, that all our besetting sins will be trampled under the subduing feet of our Master. There is great peace in the thought; but the only men and women who are ever strengthened with that assurance are the men and women who persistently, prayerfully, day by day, are making a fight against their temptations and known weaknesses. It is in the very conflict and grim wrestle with your sins that you get the divine peace which speaks to you of the coming complete, final victory. There is no real peace in this world save that. There is a peace, perhaps, of the man who takes the Christian life easily, who declares in his heart that he is quite safe for eternity, and has no great need to fight, and watch,

and pray. If you know such a man, go down upon your knees and pray for him, that his eyes may be opened. It is not the peace of God which holds that man's soul.

No, it is in the midst of all our wars and fightings, our failures and renewed struggles, our efforts, often baffled, to get righteousness and God's will done, in our work for the world, our work for the Church, our patient bearing of the burdens of others and our own, our manifold wrestling against the lust of the flesh, the prides of the world, and the infirmities of our own poor selves—it is in the midst of all these, and often when the battle is fiercest, that the great peace descends upon us like the calm of a golden evening. The selfish man knows nothing of it. The man absorbed in his own cares and business and pleasures and gettings is an utter stranger to it. It is when you put on "the armour of light," that you enter with Jesus Christ into "the peace of God which passeth all understanding."

PART IV

ST. PAUL—THE MAN AND HIS CALLING

CHAPTER XXV

OBEDIENCE THE SECRET OF GREATNESS

"Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."—ACTS xxvi. 19.

THE greatest of Christians tells us in this brief sentence the secret of his greatness, tells us the underlying principle of his life, and gives us unconsciously the explanation of all that he became and all that he was enabled to do. He was unmistakably the greatest of the saints, though in his modesty he called himself less than the least. There was no other life which exemplified more beautifully and completely the possibilities of Christian manhood, or followed more closely in the steps of the beloved and divine Master, and perhaps no other man ever did so much as he to extend the name and kingdom of that Master. He was wonderfully Christ-like. Coleridge says of him that "he was the finest gentleman in the world," and that is not small praise, if you take "gentleman" in its true and not in its conventional sense. So brave, so pitiful, so full of soldierly daring and of motherly tenderness, so humble and yet so dignified, so courteous to the lowly,

so fearless and independent before the great, so sternly moral and yet so sympathetic, so self-forgetful withal, that the feeblest saint or guiltiest sinner was almost dearer to him than his own life. It seemed as if, when Christ left the world, He determined to leave behind this brave and beautiful image of Himself, this servant and follower who embodied in his noble life all that his Master had taught and been; and who proved, by the very magnificence of his tearful and lowly service, how omnipotent the ascended Christ was in reproducing Himself in His followers.

Now, if you ask what it was that made this man so great and so lovely, so well worth studying, I can think of no one answer that will suffice save that which St. Paul himself gives here: "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

That, to begin with, was the explanation of his conversion, if such a thing can be explained. St. Paul's conversion was hardly like that which takes place in the majority of converts. It was not a change from carelessness and indifference to seriousness and anxious religious thought, still less was it the adandonment of an immoral and shameful course for one of virtue and purity. It was simply this—that there came to him a clearer, truer vision of what he ought to be and do, and he immediately followed it. St. Paul had never been what we generally mean by a bad man. He had never been a frivolous, giddy-headed votary of pleasure. He had never even been an irreligious man. There had always been in him God-fearing qualities, a deep

vein of earnestness, and a great deal of that fiery energy which cannot be happy unless it is engaged in some big work. Do not believe, for a moment, that such an energetic, enthusiastic nature as St. Paul the Christian missionary was suddenly made out of some indolent, self-indulgent young man of the world. The fire burned in him before it was refined and changed into a flame of impassioned devotion to Christ. He had always been a soldier before he became a soldier of the Cross, imbued with the soldierly spirit of obedience, full of fighting energy against what he deemed error and against what he thought was opposed to God. Pharisaism had called him, and he had gone out in full militant array to defend it. The religious orders, priests, and others had summoned him to prop up their decaying authority, and he had flung himself with ardour into the business. These were the highest voices that he knew then, and these were the fairest visions he had seen, and he followed with the same whole-hearted obedience which he afterwards gave to the Master Himself. His very zeal against the young Church and its saints was but an index of his sincerity of purpose, a prediction of the intenser devotion which in another field was to make his witness irresistible. What I mean is that the spirit of his life had been a spirit of obedience, a spirit which promptly responded to each call of duty as he heard it, and followed the course which seemed to him the highest and divinest. And when that heavenly vision burst upon him on the road to Damascus, that light brighter than the sun which pierced

through all the films and errors of his blind rage, when the voice of the hated Nazarene spoke to him in such a way that he knew it was the voice of God, when that amazing revelation showed him that he had been a misguided fool, following wandering lights, and making of his life a huge and terrible blunder, he bowed himself at once with the same submission and the same unquestioning obedience. It was enough for him to know, beyond doubt, that this was a vision of higher things, a heavenly voice, that the true Master had at last found and called him. That once settled, there was not a moment's hesitation, not a thought of the ridicule, shame, and loss which would fall upon him as turncoat, renegade, betrayer of his employers; not a thought of the scorn which would follow him for turning back on all his old professions. He gave up all things as a child might fling away its broken toys—friends, wealth, prospects of honour—took up the cross and went straight after Jesus. "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

That we may call the key to his life-story, the secret of all his moral greatness, and of all the immense service which he rendered to his fellowmen. He always obeyed when he knew, or thought he knew, what he ought to do.

And that is the key to every noble story. If ever there is a great life, if ever there is an exceptionally good life, fruitful in service, the simple explanation of it is there. They were accustomed to obey; they followed the vision of

duty which they saw, the higher voices which they heard. They did the work and walked in the path to which each day plainly pointed them. They made their convictions purposes, and they carried these purposes into action. They did not trifle with these things, or attempt to choke down the higher voice, or forget it, or put it off to a more convenient season. They just obeyed the voice straight off, as soon as they were fully assured that it was the voice of conscience, or the call of truth, or the order of God. They went out at His bidding, like Abraham or like Paul, not knowing and not asking whither it would lead them; and it led them on to be the men they were.

And now permit me to bring this thought home to ourselves, and more particularly to the younger life. Possibly you think that the great lives which I have referred to, and especially a life like St. Paul's, are altogether out of your range and above your level. The very language of the text you say marks *him* out as one who was extraordinarily favoured and miraculously endowed. He had heavenly visions, and things of that sort do not come to people now any more than angels in white robes meet them in their walks. But there we need not agree with you. The prophets and Apostles had not quite a monopoly of these things. All our young men see visions, all our maidens dream dreams. They do not come to us quite as they came to St. Paul, but they do come. Light shines around us at times which is not the sunlight, which is rather made up of rays which fall from the face of God. We have hours of

revelation, what have been called "Apocalyptic hours," when we see and feel noble things, yea, heavenly things, and a distinct voice, coming from without or within, invites us to enter the fellowship of brave, pure, earnest, God-fearing lives. These visions come in the sanctuary, or the hours of quiet thought, or when we are reading some bracing and inspiring book. And we know that they are heavenly visions; we know that we ought to obey them; but, like the rich young man in the Gospel story, we turn away from the vision. Perhaps we turn away sorrowfully, with many a backward look, feeling that we are probably losing a great deal, but still preferring to lose *that* rather than lose what we love better. We are too cowardly, or too self-indulgent, too limp altogether to be obedient to the heavenly vision. That is why so many of our lives remain on the same low, coarse level; why they do not rise; why they even degenerate, and slowly lose whatever of strong and holy purpose they had. That is why the young eyes which have at one time glowed and brightened as they looked on higher things get dull and heavy until eventually they see no more visions at all.

My brother and sister, when the visions come, turn not away from them. They are God's best gifts to you. They are the sweet touches of His love. Whatever call it be that shows you the possibility of living a purer and lovelier life delay not to accept it, for that way lies the true wealth and happiness. Reject it, and your loss is unspeakable. You are like that base Indian

of whom Shakespeare speaks, who threw away a pearl richer than all his tribe.

Now return for a moment to the great Apostle. Think how his obedience to the heavenly vision led him always along the path of clearer illumination. Little did he *know* at that moment which we call the moment of his conversion. He was still full of prejudices and errors, many of which clung to him for a long time, and impoverished his ministry. The very light within him was still dark. "Who art Thou, Lord?" he asked. He did not know. For some time he thought of Jesus as only the Saviour of the Jews. He had the most limited notion of Christ's work, what it meant, and how far it was to go. He did not wish to preach Him to the Gentiles. He wished to retain his Jewish sympathies. There was still darkness on his mind for some time to come. But as he obeyed one heavenly vision he was brought into the way which gave him another vision, and another, ever clearer and fuller, until he saw his work and calling, and saw Jesus in all the splendour of their completeness and grace. All that is beautiful, because it is all so full of promise to us.

There are young men and women found in every congregation who are full of uncertainties and questionings about religious things. They do not know how much or what to believe. They are groping for a faith; and perhaps they hardly like to confess their doubts for fear of provoking anger, or because they will meet with no sympathy. Never let us think of or speak to these

harshly or unsympathetically. For, indeed, it is not these minds that cause the preacher most concern, not the minds that are earnestly seeking, but the minds that are too frivolous and careless to seek, who never think of higher and diviner things at all.

If you are really *anxious to know* what is right and true, what you ought to believe, and what you ought to do, one need have no great anxiety about you. Only obey each higher vision as it comes, however faint and indistinct it be; that is, be prompt to answer and follow every call that you receive to better things. Only believe something, however little it be about God, and His demands upon you, and act up to that belief, and each day's obedience will add something to your knowledge and your faith. God will give you fuller and fuller light, making what is dim and uncertain clear, and showing you all that you need for life's work.

And remember that the heavenly vision comes in very humble and every-day forms, not in visits of angels or light flashing down from the skies. It comes in the simple guise of duty: the thing which you ought to do to-day, and which you know that you ought to do. That is the heavenly vision of the moment. You are to give up that sin, you are to deny yourself that pleasure, you are to undertake that bit of work for others, you are to break from certain habits and companionships. That is what God says to you at the moment. You are sure of it. It is the vision that you have to follow—follow it! Begin with

that act of obedience, and to-morrow God will show you something more—some higher things. There will be nothing wanting at the last if you make, each day, this honest confession: "I have not been disobedient to this day's heavenly vision."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE RESISTANCE OF THE HALF-CONVINCED

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."—ACTS ix. 5.

PERHAPS I ought to take it for granted that you all know the meaning of this figure—yet it will do no harm to repeat it. In our land we rarely see oxen yoked to the plough. Obedient horses do that work in our fields. But in the lands of the Bible oxen were employed in the task, and they did not take kindly to it until they were broken in. They were often in rebellious mood, and flung their heels back in angry protest against the beam or shaft of the ploughshare. They stood and kicked instead of moving on. To stop this a somewhat cruel device was applied. The beam was faced with small, sharp iron spikes, and when those rebellious limbs of theirs were flung furiously back it was only to have them pricked and sorely wounded. The most stubborn oxen speedily got tired of that self-inflicted torture; settled down to the yoke and the labour, and submissively went whither the ploughman drove. A curious figure, anything but complimentary to

apply to a man, but distinctly forcible. And this was the figure which our glorified Lord used to that haughtiest and most headstrong of men, Saul of Tarsus. Here he was, a very great personage indeed, entrusted with a most important mission, armed with letters and credentials from the most imposing authorities in his nation, lifted up with the intoxication of rage and self-assurance, resolved to destroy at a blow this new pernicious sect of Christians which had sprung up, and doubtless expecting to win great glory in doing it. And Christ appeared and knocked down his pride with this little word: told him that he was like one of those stupid oxen who, in refusing to do what they were ordered to do, only inflicted suffering upon themselves. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Now, how did the figure apply to him? What was the resemblance between this man, driving forward on his mission of persecution, and the ox refusing to be driven, and wounding himself in sheer wrath and obstinacy? Saul understood it quickly, and so may we. It meant that God had laid hold of him and yoked him to the higher service—appointed him and fastened him to the ploughshare of the Gospel —and that all this furious zeal against Jesus and the saints was just an effort to escape the yoke, to resist the power that was driving him, an effort which was bound to fail, for go he would most certainly when he had had enough of kicking against the pricks.

I. Yes, he was already yoked. A Master's hand was upon him, and he was trying to fling it off and

could not. Saul's conversion was, perhaps, completed on that day when Jesus appeared to him; but the beginning of it dates back to many a day before that. It has often been called a sudden, almost instantaneous, conversion. It was nothing of the kind. We may well question whether there was ever a conversion which could be rightly called instantaneous. There is often a sudden shock, a flash of light, a conscience smitten as with an arrow, a deciding moment; but hundreds of forgotten things have been preparing for it. That blaze of lightning which bursts out of a thunder-cloud is instantaneous, but the atmospheric conditions which prepared it have been a long time gathering to form that thunder-cloud. Conversion, when it is most sudden, has behind it days and even years of passing religious thought, and conscience-pricking, and spirit-striving. It is only when the hands are on the hour that the clock strikes, but through the whole sixty minutes the whole machinery has been moving towards this very thing. The clock struck in this case on the way to Damascus, but the wheels had been going round a long time bringing it to this point. Christ's unseen hand had been laid upon him more than once, and he had felt it, and shaken it off, half in fear and half in anger. He felt it on the day when Stephen was martyred, and when the murderers who flung the stones laid their clothes down at his feet. Someone has said that the martyrdom of Stephen converted Saul. That is overstating it; but the blood-drops of that sufferer were the seed-grain of Saul's changed life. He had

heard the courageous testimony, watched and seen the face which in its dying agony was as the face of an angel; seen with what absolute fearlessness a Christian could suffer and die. And he had noted it all with his sharp eyes. It had preached to him through his obstinately closed ears; it had pricked his heart and left a sense of pain. He had crushed it down many a time, but it rose again. It was like a fire that still burned and would not be quenched. It grew fiercer, indeed, the more he tried to quench it. He fanned his hatred against the Christian sect; he followed them, hunted them, laid fierce hands upon them, dragged them off to prison, got them scourged and stoned and slain. What of that? It only brought him face to face with them. Through every one of them Christ spoke and pleaded. He saw their patient heroism, serenity in suffering, cheerfulness in dying. He could not help asking himself the secret of it. What was it that nerved and inspired these men? There was something here which he had never found in his own orthodox Pharisaism, and what was it? Could Christ be true? Was the Nazarene, indeed, the Son of God? and in slaying these people was he murdering the saints of God? "Am I living a lie?" the voice within him said, "and shall I be obliged to confess it, and lose my proud reputation, and acknowledge to all the world that I have been a fool, a bigot, and a monster? It is too horrible! it must not and shall not be." These were the voices, these the questions ever arising in Saul's uneasy conscience, troubling him in every moment of quiet thought, and filling him with a

nameless fear. And, to stifle these voices that would not be stifled, to deaden the conscience which was all the more tremblingly alive, to cast out and overcome these dreadful misgivings about himself which were torturing him, he plunged more furiously and deeply into the work of persecution. He wanted to prove to himself that he was right, while something mightier than himself was telling him that he was wrong. "I will not be convinced," his actions said, "I will not believe that this is Christ; I will deny Him more vehemently, and hate Him more madly, and destroy all those who follow Him more relentlessly." Yet all the while the conviction deepened, the fire grew hotter the more he tried to quench it. He was fighting against the inevitable, and always wounding himself, until Christ settled the matter by that vision in the way. God had yoked him to the plough long ago, and he had resisted in vain. You can now understand these words: "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." That is a story worth telling for itself, even if there were no direct lesson in it for us. But there is. It shows us God's wonderful ways with men. It shows us how He deals with some of us still.

II. Are there not Christian people—perhaps more than a few—who did a great deal of that kicking before they submitted to the yoke of Christ? Christ held them fast long before they acknowledged it, and even when they were most determined to be quite loose of Him. Years before you were truly converted there were things

working in your hearts that prepared and forced the way of conversion. There were seeds of truth slowly growing into convictions. Maybe you came in contact with some beautiful Christian life like that of Stephen. Possibly you saw some Christian die, and it left a picture which you could never forget; or in one of fifty other ways you had Christ brought before you. You half believed in Him; you felt that He had claims upon you; you felt that the religious life had claims upon you; something drew you towards it; voices within you kept on saying at times, "That is the way I ought to go"; and the more these voices spoke the more you were determined not to go. "I a Christian? No! do you think I am going to fasten my life down in that fashion, give up my liberty, give up the pleasures I love best, give up delightful companions, spend Sabbaths in the dreary sanctuary? No, I will not." You even spoke of it with scorn; you sneered at the whole thing, at religious people, and all religious exercises. You raged against it in your anger. In fact, you were angry because it held you and you could not shake it off. The yoke was upon you, Christ's mighty power; and there you were kicking against the pricks all in vain. He conquered you at last in some sweet moment of conversion, and oh, how glad you were to be conquered! How glad you were that the struggle was over! For there had been no rest for you whilst Christ was pulling one way and your own fierce will the other. Oh, if we could have flung Christ off in the days when we tried our best

to do it, there would have been no place for us in the godly life. But He held us with too firm a grasp. We are Christians, not by our own will, but by the stronger will of Him who loved us better than we loved ourselves.

I hear some men now, at times, raging almost furiously against religion. It is all a pack of inventions, they say, and religious people just a set of hypocrites. They fling stones at the Bible, they fling mud at the Church, they half blaspheme and curse, as Saul did. You are horrified at the hot rage into which they have worked themselves. And you say, "Surely these people are given up to the Evil One. They are as far removed from conversion and the kingdom of God as one pole of the earth is far removed from the other." Do not be too sure. This zeal against religion is possibly put on to fight down the drawings which they have towards it. If they did not believe a little they would not be so anxious to prove to themselves and others that they believe nothing at all. It is more than likely that the Spirit of God is striving in them, and they are striving wrathfully and stubbornly to resist Him. And the end will be not what they say. Many a one has begun, as Saul begun, by cursing Christ and His religion and ended, as Saul did, by kneeling at the Master's feet and saying, "What wilt Thou have me to do?" If the Lord has got His hand upon you, you will submit at the last, however wilfully you refuse for the moment, for you will get tired of kicking against the pricks. I have, on the whole, more hope of the people who

tell me, in the most resolute manner, that they never will be Christians, that they hate the whole thing, who keep on insisting, "No, never." Yes, I have more hope of them than of the people who never think enough about religion even to protest against it, to whom it is just a matter of supreme indifference. Christ can kill direct opposition, but indifference well-nigh kills Him. If a man says every day, "I will not go," he is often going, in spite of himself. It is the man who never troubles himself at all about it that goes not; nor is he likely to go.

There are some of you, possibly, more especially young people, who are just in the stage of kicking against the pricks: not reviling Christ, not speaking against religion, but simply fighting against the influences which would draw you into His service. There are a hundred right thoughts in you which are pleading and pulling in that direction. Many a time you are on the point of yielding to them, then you draw back. "I will and I won't" are ever at cross purposes in your lives. You try to quench the Spirit within you, and you cannot. You try to put God away, and still He is with you. The best and the worst in you are always clashing and fighting, and there will be no peace while this is going on. How will it end? In one of two ways. You will decide as Saul of Tarsus, and find rest in the service to which Christ calls you, or you will at last, by determined persistency, silence, overcome, and crush down all that draws you to the better life. And if you do that you will never be a happy man or woman again. Men who have

never felt God's strivings may pass through life with fairly comfortable feelings, undisturbed; but those who have half yielded to Him, and then refused, carry with them always the pricking memory of something that might have been and which is hopelessly lost.

In any case, "it is hard for you to kick against the pricks

CHAPTER XXVII

LIFE'S MAIN ENDS

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—PHIL. i. 21.

THIS is a text which has been preached from times without number, wisely and unwisely. It is a saying which we have heard read, repeated, and admired more frequently than thought or memory can tell. And yet to assert it of ourselves is almost more than any of us dare. There is not one Christian in ten thousand who could give that as the full and truthful account of his life's meaning and purpose. I am not sure that we honestly believe that to die is gain. We are so accustomed to hear death spoken of as the greatest and most terrible of losses, that it requires a great effort of faith and imagination to think of it in any other light, and it is only when we see it coming, and see the world slipping from us that we fall back on the promises, and grasp by faith the better things beyond. It takes all one's life to learn that dying is gain, and most people never learn it.

Still less can we confidently declare that to live is Christ. With some of us, happily, Christ is a great factor in our lives. He occupies so large a part that were He gone it would be almost like

taking the sun out of our sky, and with all of us He fills a place greater or less. But He is not *all in all*. We have fifty other ambitions and desires which compete with Him and occasionally crowd Him out. If we serve and love Him best, we serve and love other masters far too well. And at most times these words of St. Paul are far too high for us. We can only utter them with a prayer that they may become more and more applicable and true. They express the highest Christian faith, and that only.

St. Paul said them because he had a right to say them. The whole of his Christian course had proved them, and burned them into him in living, ineffaceable letters. The fact is that he had given himself up wholly a long time ago to one work, to one service—to exalt and glorify Jesus Christ, to get other men to believe in Him, to spread His truth, push forward His kingdom, and to receive the Master's reward for that when it had been well and faithfully done. For *that* he had cheerfully sacrificed every other ambition—the getting of wealth, the acquisition of honours, the joys of family life and friendships. *That* had been the great business of his life, indeed the sole business. There had been no divided purpose, no scattering of energies on many lines. He had concentrated mind, heart, and strength on that one line. It was still true. He had nothing else to live for. With Christ gone there would be nothing left of life but the fraction of a fragment, a chaotic void, a hopeless blank. But with Christ waiting for him beyond, that life beyond would be

a continuation of the same service, only in a nobler form. For him, therefore, the words were strictly and sublimely true. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." We take the words, therefore, as the exceptional words of an exceptional man, and yet we may also say that they indicate the direction in which every believing life ought to tend and aspire. If there cannot be all of this in each of us, there ought to be something of it in all.

I. It speaks of a definite aim and purpose in life —something which stands in the front and puts everything else in the second or third place, something which determines the main bent of our thoughts and compels us to a little concentration of energies. Many of us would find it difficult to say whether we have such a leading object or not. We are interested in half a dozen or twenty things, we spread ourselves impartially over them all, but there is no one of them which becomes predominant and mighty, head and shoulders and half the body over everything else. Youth often plays with a dozen purposes before he settles on one. He wanders round a score of ambitions, a little in the butterfly fashion, fluttering over one, sucking at another, giving brief pursuit to a third, until at last, perhaps, he falls in love. Then, for the time being, all his life is focussed at that point. There is no more scattering of energies. He has found something to gain and something to live for, and where his heart is there goes the stress of his thought, and the main current of his forces until he has changed his mind or the end be gained. And it is question-

able whether we gain anything unless we put that, for the time being, first. You may win a boat-race in one season and gain a top place in the tripos the next, but you are not likely to do either if in the same days or weeks you divide yourself equally between the two. If a man wants to catch a bird with each of his hands, both birds will slip away and leave him clutching air. Success calls for concentration. You cannot excel in a sport without going in for it with all your body and about three-fourths of your mind. You cannot make a business prosperous if you are in it only knee-deep and the other part of you given to the sporting newspapers and the occupations which they suggest. You cannot be a student, or a scholar, or a writer, or a minister, or even a good mother, unless you believe that that is a principal business of your lives, and worth doing with a vast expenditure of brain and soul; and you cannot be a really religious man unless your religion takes hold of the biggest part of you, and you take hold of religion with a grip that means holding on and pursuing to the end. St. Paul, like all men who attain to anything, like all men who use their powers instead of wasting them, had a definite aim before him, an end and purpose which was more than all things else: "For to me to live is Christ."

II. These words suggest the question, "Have we grasped the real meaning and highest purpose of life? Do we read its meaning on the noisy and showy surface, or in the silent, hidden, eternal depths?" What are the things which constitute your ideas of life? What are the things which

you deem best worth doing, having, and being? For me to live is—what? There are people everywhere, young and old, who would hardly dare to answer that question to themselves, much less to others, if they answered it truthfully. There are answers which no one would have the courage to give in the sanctuary, in the presence of God, and in the searching light of the Bible. The popular philosophy of life is summed up in the word "happiness"—the greatest amount of happiness for oneself and perhaps for others. We have come back, in these advanced times, to the very thing which the Greek Epicureans were announcing in St. Paul's time, and which that Apostle pitilessly condemned. He spoke of it as the doctrine of beasts: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." People talk that philosophy in other words when they do not know it. It has come to be accepted as a thing that needs no apology that a man's main business, and indeed his only business, is to enjoy life; perhaps in an innocent and healthy way, and without doing harm to others; perhaps in an intellectual, artistic, and thoughtful way, if he has inclination and brains enough, or in a more frivolous and superficial way, if he is one of the lighter-headed; but the great end of life is to get as much out of it as possible for oneself in the way of pleasure, comforts, excitement, exercise of power, physical and mental recreation, and material good. "That is life," a thousand voices tell us. And it is so incessantly repeated that people take it up, and echo and adopt it without the least thought that there is anything very

objectionable, without the least feeling that it is shameful. Yet, if the Bible is true, that view of life is a lie. It is a debasing and degrading and demoralising and soul-destroying view. It robs life of all its dignity, and manhood of its chief excellence, and in the end it would be fatal to all the virtues. You ask, then, "Are we not to enjoy life; are we not to make the best of its pleasant, recreating, and exhilarating things?" Certainly; that is not the point at all. You might as well ask, "Are we not to eat, drink, and clothe and warm ourselves, and take exercise?" Certainly you are; you would find it difficult to live at all if you dispensed with these things. But the end of life is not to eat and drink and put on clothing. Of course you are to enjoy life, but you are not to live for enjoyment. Enjoyment is to colour and lighten life, and not to be the substance and body of it. Enjoyment is to be as the sunshine and blue in your sky, and not your whole horizon and your heaven. Keep it the second or third thing, and it is comely, it gives health to the body and cheerfulness to the soul. But make it the principal thing, and it becomes animal and devilish.

III. We were sent into the world for something more and better than that. First, we were sent *to be*, as well as to suffer and enjoy. It ought to be everyone's purpose, over and above all that he works for, gains, and enjoys in the world, to make himself, by the help of God, a worthy man, a good man, a truth-speaking, truth-loving man, a righteous man, a merciful and tender-hearted man. That purpose should be set

before all the lower things. However earnest you are in business matters, in pleasure matters, and intellectual things, the attainment of character, integrity, goodness should stand first. Every man and woman should say, "Whatever else I win and do, I will keep steadily in view, and keep always in front, the building up of a strong, moral, healthy, just, pure, and kindly manhood. I will carry on a daily fight against all the things which would tempt, seduce, and defile my thoughts and affections. I will fight against the selfishness, passions, and appetites of my own nature, and keep them in subjection. In fact, my foremost endeavour shall be to become a good, true man or woman." That was what St. Paul meant, in part, when he said, "For to me to live is Christ." His great object concerning *himself* was to have his life shaped in Christ's mould and after Christ's pattern. He wanted his life to grow into that perfect life. And that will be, with every Christian, life's main end, so far as concerns *himself*, to strive after conformity to the man Christ Jesus, and to attain at last to all that Jesus was and is.

But every thoughtful and honest life will have another leading object, which has to do, not with himself, but with God, the world, and his fellow-men. We were sent into the world, not principally for our own enjoyment, but to be helpers of our fellow-men, and to share with them whatever of light, sweetness, and good we know. If life has not, on the whole, a ring of sympathy, a ring of unselfishness, a ring of human love in it, then all the ring of it is false, base, and hollow. We are

here to do good, as well as to get good. We are only cumbering the world if we are not striving to make it a little better. We are here to spread all the truth we see, all the goodness we know. We are here to add our atom to the forces which make for good, and to join our feeble hands with the hands of all those who are warring against sin, ignorance, and suffering. We are here to get God's will done among our fellow-men. St. Paul believed, as every Christian believes, that the best and the only effectual way of doing that is to spread the name, influence, and saving power of Jesus Christ. Everything else will come if we can get the cross-power of Jesus established—His purifying, renewing power—if we can get Him and His love and pity built up in society and in the hearts of men. "The object of my life," says St. Paul, "is to do that. For me to live is to help on Christ's purpose and victory."

Here, then, you have the two objects which are to be in the forefront of life. Put the others where you please; give them as much attention as you can spare, and as much as they deserve; but these two are to stand in front—the winning of Christ-like character and goodness for yourselves, the spread of Christ's goodness, truth, and power in the world. Save your own lives in a noble sense, and help to uplift and save the world's life. That sums up the whole thing. That is the Christian philosophy of life; that is the reading of the text which comes to everyone: "For to me to live is Christ"; and, if you have laid hold of that, you may add the concluding words, "To die is gain."

And it cannot be gain to those who have lived by lower rules. To the man whose philosophy has been just "Enjoy yourselves" death will be an awful awakening and a terrible nakedness. Everything that he has striven for and done will be left behind. It will be *loss*, *loss*, *loss*—being stripped of all things. You cannot carry your pleasures and gains across the river of death; you can only carry torturing memories and a sense of guilty waste and neglect. Death means irretrievable loss to everyone who has had no high purpose in living.

Death can only be a gain to those who have believed throughout that this life is but the beginning of a longer life, and who have been gathering here something that will abide there. Righteousness, love, joy, purity, tenderness of heart, God-likeness, service faithfully rendered, the consciousness of the Master's reward, the assurance of His forgiveness, and the companionship of the Master—these things will go with you through the gates of death. They will be strengthened, increased, and made perfect in that higher sphere. And Christ Himself will be nearer and infinitely more precious there.

Where these things have been Death is not the *king of terrors*, but the great promoter. And if in any most unworthy yet true sense you can say, "For to me to live is Christ," you will be able to say also, in humble confidence, when the hour comes, "and to die is gain."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE PRIVILEGE AND JOY OF SERVICE

"But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."—ACTS xx. 24.

IT would be difficult to find, even in the Bible, braver and nobler words than these. They were characteristic of the man—a man who absolutely forgot fear, and every prompting of the lower nature in the passion of a mighty enthusiasm, in entire devotion to a great cause. He was bidding farewell to those dear friends at Ephesus among whom God had given him great fruits for the Gospel, and whose hearts he had unconsciously won by his gracious character and ministry. It was a tearful parting, for something told him that they would never look on each other's faces again. He was on his way to Jerusalem, following one of those impulses of the Spirit, obeying one of those secret orders of the King which came to him often, and which were to him imperative. A power not himself, a voice within mightier than his own spirit, called him now to Jerusalem, as he had once been called to Macedonia, and he forthwith girded

himself for the journey and started out, as many another prophet had done, as Jesus Christ Himself had gone to be crucified. It was the city which had killed so many of the prophets and slain the messengers of God that were sent to it. St. Paul knew that for him, as for his Master, the way to that city was through the valley of the shadow of death. He could not foresee the end, whether it would be a cross or a scaffold—the end was hidden in profound darkness; but he saw something of what awaited him before the end was reached. In one place and another, as he passed along, there came to him dreams by night or visions in the daytime—visions of chains and dungeons, of weary confinement, and lonely, useless hours prolonged in prison, of a captivity from which there would be no outlet save that which death brings at last to every captive. He saw all this before him, but not for a moment did he pause or question the order which sent him forward. It was enough that the Master required his witness there. "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." Two main thoughts find expression here. He regarded Christian service as a privilege which more than compensated for all pains. He earnestly desired that he might have a spirit of joy in doing it to the end.

I. Christian service a privilege. So St. Paul speaks of the ministry which he has received of the

Lord Jesus. It is the boon which he has received of the Lord's dear hands; it is Christ's invaluable gift to him. He knows that it is leading him on now to bonds and imprisonment. No matter!—to have it and to exercise it is worth more than all which it will cost. He remembers, he can never forget, that it has brought him, year after year, sufferings and penalties of many kinds—stonings, scourgings, hootings, hatred, loss of honour, loss of friendships, deprivation of all comforts. According to all appearances, that gift of Christ had been a fatal gift, involving him in every conceivable misfortune. No matter! he is immeasurably proud of it. The cost is not worth counting in view of the sacred splendour of the gift. It is the one treasure, next to Christ's love, which makes life sweet—just the blessedness of serving! It is invariably in this language that he speaks of it. The prophets used to call the service of the Lord a "burden." It was an awful weight upon them which they would have gladly laid down if the Lord had permitted. Never once does the Apostle use that word "burden." It is not something that he carries. It is something that lifts him up, gives lightness to his feet, expansion to his heart, magnifies him in his own eyes. He always speaks of the mercy and love which have called him to serve, the condescension which has stooped to use him, the infinite grace which has entrusted the divine treasure to such a poor earthen vessel. "I thank God that He counted me worthy, putting me into the ministry." "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given." Never does he speak of it

as a hardship, only to be endured for the sake of what will follow; never as a toiling and weary workman thinks of his labour—something to be got through with a view to the wages. Only very occasionally does he refer to the rewards, the heavenly rest, and the crown of righteousness which will be given him at the end. The service itself is a great and almost sufficient reward. To have been chosen for this thing, appointed to it by the King's command, to be a vessel in the hand of the Almighty, bearing witness of His grace and sharing with Christ the glory of serving—that is the grand thing. "None of these things move me, in view of the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus."

Now let us not imagine that this refers merely to the preacher's work; let us not thus narrowly limit the word *ministry*. We use it of the pastor's work; we call that the ministry. Paul used it in the widest possible sense—of every kind and degree of Christian service. Whatever your work for Christ, whatever the sphere in which you have to sustain the Christian character, whether your duty is to be done in school, mission, home, workshop or sanctuary, whether you glorify His name in some prominent and public capacity or simply bear witness for Him in obscure ways and private places, you have been put into what St. Paul calls "the ministry." It is the ministry which you have received of the Lord Jesus. Do you regard it as St. Paul did? Alas! how often we talk of Christian service, or at least think of it, as if it were just what we mean by service and nothing more; as if

we felt all the hardness of it and had little appreciation of the honour; as if the bondage far outweighed the privilege; as if the cost which it demanded far outweighed the joy; as if the loss of worldly pleasures far more than balanced the blessedness of being Christ's companions; and as if the thought of it were only made tolerable by that hope of better things to come which is linked on with it. To those who understand it, to those who know anything about its real, deep nature, it is a grand thing, it is a magnificent privilege just to be a Christian, to have received the heavenly calling, to have been appointed to the humblest place in the fellowship of saints, to have any part, however small, in testifying of the grace of God, and to be permitted even the most insignificant work in companionship with Jesus. It is worth a hundred times more than it costs to be able to say, "I am in the service of Christ by the will of God"; "None of these things move me, in view of the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus."

II. Think of the continuous joy of service. "None of these things move me," says St. Paul, "if I may only finish my course with joy"; that is, literally, "if I may only run the whole of my race up to the end with joy." He did not wish simply to run it as one getting more and more weary of it, and thankful if he has just strength enough left to carry him, half fainting, to the goal; but to run it all with light and happy feet, as one moves to the sound of music. He wished to feel the work as sweet and welcome at every following stage, and at the finish, as it

had been at the beginning. And he did not ask for it in vain. It was given him. He testifies, in his last Epistle, that he had finished his course and fought the good fight, always with the same gladness of heart.

It is a good thing not to grow *weary* in well-doing, to hold on to it with any sort of faith and patience; but it is a far better thing if we never cease to have joy in doing it, if we can do it all with a sweet singing in our hearts and a happy willinghood beaming in our faces. One of the most disheartening things in the Christian life is that, with most of us, the shining face of it gets bedimmed and dust-covered, and the joy which began with a pure rich flame falls into a feeble taper-light, or even a smoking torch. The rich, full emotions, which were like a fountain overflowing, sink down into dry, insipid feelings, in which there is no banquet at all. How wonderful, to some of us, were the early charms of the Christian life! How golden and rosy the first buddings of faith's spring-time! What thrilling romance there was in the story of Christ's love for us, and the swift beating of our hearts in responding love to Him! How beautiful to feel that heaven was near, and the very skies like window-panes through which we could look up to God's face! We thought that life would be, as the poet says, "one long, sweet song." But by and by the romance is past. The morning freshness changes into the dusty heat of the day, and the impassioned love cools down into a sluggish affection which needs much stirring. The face of

Jesus loses some of its attraction because we have looked upon it so often, and joy is an angel that we only see on rare occasions. We do not give up the Christian life. Comparatively few of those who have once tasted of the grace of God lose all relish for it. Comparatively few of those who have loved Jesus cast Him out of their hearts altogether. But many lose the rapture and the ecstasy, and they plod on in the path of faith somewhat wearily, "faint yet pursuing," only caught up now and then on the wings of freedom and fervent delight, only now and then expanded with the sense of unutterable joy.

And this is especially true of what we call Christian work. It is so difficult to see it always with the shining face, to see it always with the glory of the Master settled upon it, to see Christ's handwriting upon it, those dear lines which tell us that the work is His, and that we are appointed to it. Our preaching, our deacon's service, our teaching in the Sunday school, our labour in the mission—you know how hard it is to keep the fire burning and the interest fresh. It is like trundling the wheels of God, and pushing them laboriously forward without feeling the Spirit of God in them. There is so much routine, so much that seems almost mechanical, so much that is hardly better than drudgery, so much repeating and walking over again the same oft-trodden ground! Oh, if we were employed, like the seraphim, to carry fire direct from God's altar to human lips, it would be so exciting and delightful! but to go on with the same prosaic, monotonous task just because it

is the King's command, to fill our little sphere of unrewarded duty not knowing how it is to glorify God—*that* is hard; and nothing but a constant reflooding of our hearts with the love of Jesus can enable us to continue our course with joy. Yet that will do it. I speak these words particularly to those who are in the work, and looking forward, perhaps, to those winter months in which Christian organisations are supposed to be busiest and Christian activities more manifest. It is possible always to carry on our work with joy; but that can only be if we never lose the sense of privilege, if we believe that every bit of work we do is truly by the King's command; that it is the exalted work of *God*, though it seems the merest drudgery of human toil. *That* can only be in so far as we keep aloof from those doubtful things of the world which breed a certain distaste and weariness of higher things. *That* can only be if we try to put our Christian work first and everything else behind. And, above all, it can only be in so far as we keep the Master's face in *view*, as we think of all His labours and the joy of spirit in which He did them, and as we realise the sense of His presence, and the "Well done!" which awaits us, not at the end only, but every time we have done some poor service for Him.

And so I pray for you and for myself, that gladness may never fail us at any stage of the journey; that, like St. Paul, we may "finish our course with joy."

CHAPTER XXIX

FAITH ON ITS PRACTICAL SIDE

"And when he had thus spoken, he took bread and gave thanks to God in presence of them all."—ACTS xxvii. 35.

IT was a favourite saying of Thomas Carlyle that "a hero is a hero at all points of him, in the secret heart of him first of all"; that is, his heroism comes out on all occasions. He needs no specially prepared platform to show his qualities. Wherever he treads is his platform. Place him wherever you please, he cannot help being just what he is, just what God has made him. This, at least, was magnificently true of St. Paul. We see him disputing with Athenian philosophers, we see him in prison, we see him before howling mobs, we see him standing before magistrates and kings, and in all these scenes he is unchanged. It is always the same calm face that confronts us, and the same brave heart, strengthened with God's might in the inner man. And now we see him in an entirely new and unfamiliar position, not facing the wrath of man, but exposed to the terrors of the sea. And it may be truly said that he never showed himself to more advantage than on the deck of this storm-shaken, half-foundering ship.

This enthusiast, fanatic, and dreamer, as most men called him, this visionary and impractical idealist, as most men deemed him, proved to be the most shrewd, cool-headed, clear-sighted man on board when the extreme danger put them all on their trial. He knew nothing of the mariner's trade. He had served no apprenticeship on that line; but he had learned to keep his eyes open, his mind steady, and his pulses calm. He had been trained to despise danger, and to look without blanching into the grim face of death. He knew how to do the right thing at the right time, and was able to do it without flurry or excitement. All *that* served him now. It is not so much skill that avails in hours of peril, but the unshaken nerve, the steady hand, the heart that beats evenly, the courage that rises to the occasion. This was St. Paul's qualification in that scene which lent itself to panic. He faced the storm there, as he had faced many a furious crowd, as he faced the great Cæsar afterwards—sure of himself because sure of his God, having that within which mastered fear, and subduing other people's terrors by his own undisturbed serenity; he made them all feel, from the captain of the ship down to the humblest cabin-boy, that they were in the presence of a master-mind, that there was inspiration in his example and safety in his counsels. Better still, he made them all feel that God was near, because he was so sure of it himself. We have here two or three pictures of the Christian man worth studying.

I. We have the Christian life on its practical

side, in its plain week-day clothes, taking up the common work which happened to be nearest, and doing it in such a way that it could not be better done. This man, St. Paul, was a missionary, preacher, saint; a man who saw visions, who lived above the ordinary world, in a world of higher thoughts and ideas which Christ had created for him; a man who had his being among spiritual things. Of such men the world is always ready to say, "They are good for nothing except their own special business. Put them to anything which requires a bit of common sense and practical judgment, and they are no better than children." Most of you have an idea that a preacher out of the pulpit is hopelessly incompetent, and hardly better than one of the foolish. That was exactly what the sailors thought of St. Paul and his missionary companions. Imagine the surprise when they saw these saints throw off their coats and handle ropes and tackles as if they had been bred to the trade. "The third day," says St. Luke, who was one of the company, "we cast out, with our own hands, the tackling of the ship." *We* did it, in fact, because the others had all collapsed. They had lost heart, and flung down their work in despair. The cry went round, "All is lost! No use fighting against destiny!" And then these preachers and saints took the work with a cheery, *nil desperandum* spirit, and shamed the others into following their example. A real man of God will always act in that way. If a saint does not lead the way in doing the duty of the hour, whatever it may be, a fig for his sainthood! What is religion, indeed,

but highest equipment for duty? Educate a man wisely and thoroughly, educate his heart and will, as well as his head; and, wherever he goes, that education will stand him in good stead, and help him to do every bit of work that falls to his hand in a more efficient way. And religion is education of the highest kind. It never lifts a man above work, but shows him how to do it, helps him to do it honestly, and take a pride in doing it well, even if it be of the humblest kind. I like to look on that great saint, Paul, that sublime Apostle, that heavenly minded enthusiast. I like to look on him as he works there with the sweat on his brow, the ropes in his hands, showing the sailors how to do it. He was teaching as fine a lesson of godliness *there* as when he wrote those noble Epistles which have borne witness for Christ through all the world.

And let not this feature pass, that, while that work was in hand, he gave himself to it as if his whole heart and purpose were in it. He did no preaching, no religious talk, no audible praying; his secret soul was praying, no doubt, but there were no words. It was not the time for that; there was an immediate duty to perform. The ship had to be lightened, and needed all hands. Weaker men would have neglected work for prayer. Nervous and excitable Christians would have shrieked out, amid the ship's din, that they were all going to be lost, and that they must prepare to meet their God. Sentimental religion sometimes grows frantic on such occasions, and makes itself a nuisance. St. Paul understood his

work better—his *Master's work.* In this hour hands were wanted, not words. The first thing was to save the *lives* of the ship's crew. The time for dealing with their souls would come later. All through the voyage he had been waiting anxiously to speak to these men about the higher things. All those days in which they were fighting with the storm it had been hard for him to keep silent. "After long abstinence," says St. Luke, after a long restraint upon himself, he spoke. The words had burned on his lips, but it would have done no good to utter them until the fit time came. The men were not in the mood; they were too busy, too excited, too feverish. Men like St. Paul know when to speak as well as what to speak. There are times when to speak of sacred things is but to profane them; when, to force our religious professions and appeals upon men's attention is but to offend, and even invite ridicule. Thoughtful Christians reserve their solemnities for seasonable hours. They feel men's pulses and heart-beats before they speak. St. Paul worked on, and spoke not until he had won the confidence of the men by his fearless attitude and bold leadership, until the storm had spent its wildest force, and the extreme peril was over. Then to those weary and anxious toilers of the sea he spoke the truths which were more than life to him, and in the words spoken here he gives another picture of the Christian life—

II. The Christian life on its radiant, uplifted, joyful side. The first thing he told these men was to be of good cheer, and the last thing he said

to them was much the same. It was the word which he had learned from the Master. "Be of good cheer." They were in the hands of God. They were not at the mercy of the waters and the winds. They were in the power of One who could direct and subdue the angry waters at His own good pleasure. "I have no fear for myself," said St. Paul, "and I have no fear for you. The Master whom I serve has told me that my work is not yet done, that I have yet to bear witness for Him in many places. He will preserve my life until He has no further need for my service here. I shall not perish on this ship, nor will you. A Voice which has never deceived me tells me that every life on board will be saved. Therefore, be of good cheer." He spoke like a prophet; his tone was inspiring, They felt that some supernatural force was behind this certainty. The words ran with thrilling and convincing force through them; they believed him, and were of good cheer. Then the days passed on—the dreary days in which there was no sunlight, and the ship went plunging through the storm helmless, mastless, ungovernable, driven by the winds and currents through the darkness, none could guess whither. At last they were close to land, well-nigh on the breakers. The anchors were dropped in the deep darkness, and the men had nothing to do but wait for daybreak.

Then St. Paul spoke again, and proposed a communion-feast, a feast of thanksgiving and gladness. It was like a sacrament. It was indeed the Lord's Supper on ship-board, and never was the Lord's Supper observed in a stranger scene and

place than that, with those rough men as communicants. But, you see, the key-note of all that he said and did was gladness and good cheer. These men had been fasting more or less for fourteen days. They had been afraid to eat meat, or eat anything more than barely sufficed to keep body alive. They had fasted religiously. It was the bit of dark, cheerless religion they had which taught them this abstinence. They were heathen men, and their gods were cruel; their worship, when they worshipped at all, was dark and fearful; there was always a sort of shivering in it. Religion had no bright and comforting side with them. They thought now that the storm had come because the gods were angry, and that they must appease the gods by going hungry and miserable, and all through those wild days they had been engaged in this sad business. Now the Christian man preaches to them a gospel of gladness: "No good in afflicting your souls and starving your bodies to make God propitious. The God in whom I believe, and would have you believe, is kindness, goodness, pure Fatherhood, and the worship which He loves best is simple trust and gratitude, and faces lifted up to Him radiant with joy. I pray you to take some meat; you need it for strength and health. There is not one man of you going to perish." And then he took bread and gave God thanks in presence of them all. And they all caught the contagion of his serene confidence and happy hopefulness, and they all joined in the thanksgiving feast, and were all of good cheer.

Is it not, throughout, a lovely story? Is it not a perfect picture of what the Christian life should be? Practical and ideal, full of action and full of prayer, ready to do the commonest work, and able to walk on the highest level, bearing witness for Christ by simple honesty in labour, by the exhibition of a dauntless spirit, by fearlessness in danger, by preaching and appealing at the fit time only, profoundly solemn yet aboundingly joyful, filling the whole atmosphere with the pulses of elevated thought, steadying men, leading them, inspiring them, acting as a king and priest among them.

The story is worth studying again and again as a proof of what the real Christ-like man can do in scenes which are unfamiliar and uncongenial to him, as a proof of the masterhood which his faith gives him over all other minds. This prisoner saved two hundred and seventy-six lives, not by his skill, but by the simple steadiness of mind and heart and the spirit of hope which his trust in God supplied. It came to pass as he had predicted concerning them all. Some swam to shore, and the rest, some on boards and some on broken pieces of the ship, and so it came to pass that they escaped all safe to land.

And we cannot do better than pray for more of the Christian power which made this man so great.

CHAPTER XXX

THE TRUE INDEPENDENCE

"But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: for He that judgeth me is the Lord."—1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

There were two features of this man's character which made him more like his Master than almost any other figure in the New Testament. One was his tender, self-forgetting consideration for everyone around him, and the other was his noble independence of everyone about him. Like the Master, he made himself one with all men, yet held himself, in a sense, above all men. He was at once their servant and their master. He loved all, but feared none. He would do anything in the world to conciliate and win their trust, except perhaps the one doubtful thing which they wished him to do, and he would not do that to win the world. It seemed as if contradictory qualities met in him. Yet they were not contradictory; they belonged to the same fine Christian soul. He was one of the humblest of men, and the proudest. He called himself the least of the Apostles, yet, when it came to a dispute, he carried his point over all the Apostles. He was always stooping,

yielding his own wishes and laying himself out to please men, yet inflexible, and immovable as a mountain when they would have drawn him away from the principles which his conscience approved and the course which his Lord directed. A little child could lead him, but all the forces in the world could not drive him a hair's-breadth from a conviction. In fact, he was ready to serve all the world, and yet he was servant to none except that one Divine Master to whom he had given his life unreservedly. And this, his absolute independence of every authority but Christ's, made him the fearless, strong, commanding man he was; invested him, in spite of himself, with a sort of pre-eminence in the apostolic band, and gave him an influence incomparably greater than that of any other in shaping the thoughts of the Church through all ages. If we must go to other scenes in his life to discover the gentler and sweeter features of the man, it is in such words as these that we read the secret of his strength: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: for he that judgeth me is the Lord."

Now these are very noble and bold words, *the speech of a spiritual giant.* They have been repeated and acted upon, in substance, by all the great leaders of men, and they define the attitude which should be assumed, more or less, by every servant of the Lord Jesus. But they need reading carefully, soberly, and wisely, and he who preaches about them should measure his sentences and tread circumspectly, or he will just talk impracticable and foolish things.

I. In the first place, it is not easy to tread an absolutely independent course, to be guided solely by our Master's orders, and to stand for ever, as it were, before His judgment-throne. It is terribly difficult, indeed, to keep the compass fixed in one direction straight and true, when a thousand influences, like powerful magnets, are playing upon it, and, half unconsciously to ourselves, pulling it aside. We are carried along by the currents of human opinion when we think we are steering by heaven's light alone. We secretly yield when we fancy that we are most boldly resisting. Our very consciences are shaped and coloured by the atmosphere in which we do our work, and we dance to the piping of the world when we think all our movements are swayed by music of a diviner sort. There are times when heaven seems a long way off, and the human forces around us painfully and oppressively near, and it needs an heroic heart, indeed, to hold on to the true like rock, and not have our feet lifted up and borne away by the rush of custom, habit, and sentiment in which our lives are placed.

II. And, further, one should be very sure of his ground before he takes this attitude, and he should only take it after incessant prayer for guidance and enlightenment. There is a world of difference between St. Paul's sublime independence and the self-conceit of the man who thinks that he is right and everybody else wrong, and yet it is very easy to mistake the one for the other and to fancy that we have attained a noble height of righteousness when we have fallen into a fit

of obstinacy and pride. When a young man—or an old man for that matter—sets at defiance the well-considered judgments of all whose advice is weighted with disinterested goodness and the experience of years and takes his own course with determined step and unbending will, it is far more likely that he is following the torchlight kindled by his own passions or vanity than going where the light of conscience or heaven's radiance shows the way, and his independence is more likely to bring him the promotion of fools than the reward of heroes and saints. It is taking upon ourselves an awful responsibility when we claim for our own judgment a sort of infallibility, and treat as mistaken or prejudiced the contrary opinion of those who have the best claims upon our trust. And this should never be done save in the great emergencies of life, and only then after deliberate thought and wrestling prayer. Take care that conscience is free from bias and passion and that God is wholly with you before you assume an attitude so exalted or so defiant.

III. Moreover, we ought not to treat lightly the judgment of other men, unless they are of such a character that their judgment has no moral weight. St. Paul says he will not be swayed or moved out of his course by the judgment of those cavilling critics and would-be authorities in Corinth. No, for they were not men whose opinion was commended by wise action and Christliness of thought. They were ambitious, vainglorious, frivolous, full of dissensions and

envies, carnal, and even sensual. It was not likely that he would attach great value either to their censures or approvals. "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of *you*—or of *any* man," he adds, with just a flash of indignation. In fact, any man's judgment was small compared with the judgment of his Lord. Yet not small when out of that comparison, for St. Paul himself does not always speak in such terms as these. He had an absolute contempt for the opinions of crafty, dishonest, vulgar-minded men, and nothing but respect for the judgment of those whom he loved and trusted. He wished to stand well with *good men.* Their approval was dear to him, their censures and misjudgments gave him sharp pain. He was constantly defending his own doings, and vindicating his motives to clear away misunderstandings and to secure *their trust.* He was not a man who walked his solitary way careless and defiant of what the world thought of him. He was sensitive, in a high degree, to the favourable opinion of everyone who was morally worth considering. The great thing was to have his Master's "Well done!" And after that, if it could be, the approval of all who did and sought righteousness.

And that will be the attitude of every man and woman who is trying to live in a brave and Christly manner. It is the merest affectation or the cant of bravado for a man to say he does not care what the world thinks of him. He does care, unless he is a hardened profligate or devoid of feeling, and he *ought* to *care.* "We are members

one of another." We ought to please one another, and conciliate and yield to one another, so long as we can do it without sin. And we all like to be thought well of, to see the light of kindly appreciation in the eyes of those about us; we like to have our labours recognised and our abilities treated with respect, and our honesty believed in. All this is both natural and pardonable, and even beautiful. It is only wrong when we degrade ourselves to disarm the censures or secure the approval of the unworthy. To be sensitive in that direction is to be an abject coward. We should only be afraid of the judgment of our *peers*; that is, of those who are morally equal or superior to us. But to be afraid of the chatter and clatter of flippant tongues, of the shallow criticism of unthinking minds, of the cheap sneers of moral weaklings, to deviate from the right course for fear of losing popularity and favour with those whom we inwardly despise, is to sell our conscience for votes, or a breath of flattery, or a mess of pottage. It is, indeed, to make ourselves the obedient slaves of those over whom God has made us moral masters. It is always that which lets us down to weakness, inconsistency, and moral fickleness. We are in such mortal fear of what small souls will say about our doings, words, social position, and other matters; in fear of what the empty-headed and depraved-hearted will say, if we do not skip and run to their piping, that it kills all the valour in us and half the honesty. Seek the good opinion of those whose lives and thoughts give weight to their judgment, and you

cannot go far wrong—*not far*—and concerning all the baser sort let your language be: "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you: for He that judgeth me is the Lord."

IV. Yet sometimes, not often, thank God! you have to go alone, as St. Paul did many times, leaving even the good men out of your company. You have to do what God and conscience plainly show, though those whom you most trust, and who have consciences as sensitive as yours, do not see that your way is right and best. You have at times, though—I repeat the word—*not often*, to take your choice between violating your deepest convictions and losing the confidence and approval of some of the truest of men. They shake their heads, they are doubtful, they pity you, they think you are making a huge blunder, they even fall away from you. Then it is for you to say, "Even at that cost I must obey the voice of God." For, when it comes to that, a man's own prayer-enlightened conscience is to be the supreme judge. All the world together does not know so well what is right for him as he knows himself, and to his own self he must be true, or he loses everything. And if you take that course, regardless of immediate consequences, it will come about, in nearly every instance, that the tide which has gone against you will eventually return and be with you. The men who believed you wrong will slowly discover that it was the right and godly way you took, and in the end you will win back the favour and approval which, for an hour of loneliness and darkness, were withdrawn. The very world comes

round at last to those who have steadily followed the clear light of duty, and made God's will their supreme law, and if you do not get that reward in the present world, because life is not long enough, and you have not had time to wait for it, it will surely come in the life beyond, and both here and there you will have the greater approval of the Master, which is, after all, far better.

Indeed, though I have talked so much about the approval of men, it would hardly be a Christian sermon if it did not lift the Christian life above human judgment-thrones into the all-searching presence of Him whose judgment is final and whose simple "Well done!" is worth infinitely more than all the volumes of human praise.

It would be a poor thing for the world if brave lives were only lived and good deeds only done with an eye turned to the public and an ear open to the sound of kindly human approval. The world is sweetened, and half saved, by the innumerable lives of goodness and acts of self-sacrifice which owe all their inspiration to the love of the unseen Master and the hope of His "Well done!" The world has little knowledge of them; the public eye passes them by; they are not criticised or praised by human lips. Here and there one knows of them, and God *knows them*—and that is enough.

There are men who, day by day, are suffering loss through sheer scrupulous honesty; winning sneers, perhaps, because of their excessive scrupulosity and purity of motive. There are men and women who are bearing their own sorrows patiently and

bravely, without a word of complaint, and taking also a large share in the burdens and pains of others; men and women who, in a thousand fields, little noticed and unrewarded, are sowing seeds of goodness, fighting the fight against the evil, and spending themselves for the Name's sake.

These are the beautiful souls who most of all prove Christ's presence among men. Moved by the imperative of duty, constrained by love divine, cheered by the hope of the Master's final acceptance and "Well done!" they carry themselves sweetly through life. And they, indeed, could say with St. Paul, "With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you: for He that judgeth me is the Lord."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE CRY OF HUMAN INSUFFICIENCY AND THE ANSWER TO IT

"And who is sufficient for these things?"—2 Cor. ii. 16.
"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves: . . . but our sufficiency is of God."—2 Cor. iii. 5.

If you read what goes before and then these words you are startled by the sudden change of voice. There is an abrupt fall from the triumphant Hallelujah Song to this low wail of pleading weakness: "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ"; "And who is sufficient for these things?" It is like the cry of the spent and wounded warrior following immediately the shout of the victor. Down he drops from the glorious heights to the valley of fear and trembling. And then, in the next moment, he is on the hill-tops again: "But our sufficiency is of God." St. Paul was full of these contrasted moods. One hour absolutely fearless in the all-conquering power of God, and then shaking like a reed in the wind at the remembrance of his own weakness. The foes outside never disturbed him; he was like a granite rock against their assaults. But the foe within, the treacherous weakness in his own heart! He

was all of a tremble when he thought of that. He feared no man except himself, but he was terribly afraid of himself. There were these alternations of up and down continually. And all this helped to make him a preacher. For the preacher is made up of heights and depths, raptures of faith and tremblings of feebleness. He cannot understand your temptations unless he is sometimes humbled to the dust before his own, and he cannot lift you to the heights unless he often mounts to them himself. Nay, the very saint is made up in this way: mighty in God, and weaker than a child in himself. At times he treads the sunny hill-tops of faith with the serenity of heaven about him; then he comes down and toils along the dusty, level road of cheerless duty; whilst ever and anon he drops down into the dusky valleys of humiliation. When he thinks of his feeble self and the forces arrayed against him he cries out like a frightened child, and only when he forgets himself in the divine power which girds him round does he know the joy, peace, and confidence of believing. And, truly, we are all made up of these contrasts if we are fighting life's battle under God's orders. "Who is sufficient for these things?" "Our sufficiency is of God." "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ."

I. We take, first, this cry of the human in man, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Sooner or later it is wrung from all our lips. No man gets through life without uttering that groan far more than once. Youth sometimes escapes it. There

is a glorious self-confidence in youth which has not yet discovered the limitations of its power. We go into the battle merrily, with courageous steps and a light heart, and perhaps with a spice of contempt for the foe. We think we are well able to overcome. We have not yet grappled with the big problems, or stooped under the big burdens, or writhed under the cruel strokes of disappointment; but we meet all these things as we pass along, and they take some of the conceit out of us, and make us bite the dust at times, and occasionally take the heart out of us, as well as the conceit. For the battle is so much harder when we get into the thick of it, and the bravest man has fits of cowardice, and the cleverest man begins to feel that he is not too wise, and we all have occasion to repeat this text before we get through. "Who is sufficient for these things?" It comes sooner to the man with an earnest purpose and religious ideals. Everyone whose thoughts move on a higher level, everyone who wishes to carry into the thick of the struggle a sensitive and enlightened conscience and to make righteousness the girdle of his loins, everyone who accepts the Christian calling and binds himself by its obligations, must feel at times that he is unequal to the strain, that the burden laid upon him is greater than he can bear, and that, on the human side, he is most inadequately equipped for so great a battle.

Possibly you will not feel this so much, or at all, if your aims are low and vulgar. If it is merely a question of getting on, pushing yourself into fortune or notoriety without much regard to

the means, then you may force your way through to a coarse success without the least sensitive feeling of your own inability. But the moment you direct your thoughts and strivings to nobler ends, that moment you bid farewell to the arrogant self-conceit of coarser minds, and begin to repeat these trembling words of St. Paul. Who can set before him the Christian ideal without a shiver of fear? It is high; it is terribly high! It overwhelms us, it terrifies us, we fly from it into forgetfulness, or into the arms of a compassionate God. We listen to some of the lofty sayings of Jesus; we hear Him repeating the sublime demands of the Sermon on the Mount, and our poor hearts answer, "It is high; we cannot attain to it"; or, like the disciples, we groan out, "Who, then, can be saved?" Nay, we hear His interpretation of the Ten Commandments, we hear Him sum it all up in the brief words, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength, and thy neighbour as thyself." And we sigh, "How can it be?" Human nature stops paralysed before this awful height. "What man is sufficient for these things?" It is easy to say, "Fear God, and keep His commandments, for that is the whole duty of man"; but to do that whole duty is as hard as a daily martyrdom. It is never easy except when you shirk it, it is never a light burden except when you preach it and do not practise it. In all departments of human life human nature is severely taxed, and at times pressed beyond measure if it would keep the true purpose always in view, and save its best ideals from being trampled in the mire. In the business

world, and the world of public life, there are enormous temptations and appalling difficulties in the path of him who would preserve a conscience void of offence, and deviate not a hair's-breath from the principles of rectitude. I do not wonder that you are sometimes impatient with the preacher when, with his scant experience and knowledge of the grim realities, he bids you walk as unspotted angels through the muddy streets and slimy alleys of competition. You murmur angrily, "What does he know about it?" or perhaps you sigh painfully, "Who is sufficient for these things?" It comes to those who have only domestic worries and cares—though why say "only"? They are often heavy enough to exhaust all the sweetness and break down all the patience of a woman's heart. One needs the temper of a seraph or of a Christ to keep all things straight in a home and the many wheels moving without jar, squaring income and expenditure, meeting sometimes unreasonable demands and complaints of the least unamiable husband, and bearing with all the whims, caprices, and self-will of the least vexatious children. In every home where a good woman lives there is a soul which has to train itself to endurance by patient prayer, and which, in spite of prayer, will often ask, in half-suppressed sighs, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Yes, and there is for us all, if we have the Christian mind, that battle between the flesh and the spirit which St. Paul often felt and acknowledged with groans. It is so hard to keep the body down, to get the better of the sensual and the carnal, to rise above our gross

material selves, our lusts and prides, envies and vanities, and walk on that higher level of spiritual purity and self-mastery which the Christian rule requires—so hard, in fact, that the strongest will trembles at its own weakness and the firmest faith is frightened by its own insufficiency. And never more does the thought come over us than in the bitter and sorrowful things of life, when the journey reaches the dark places, when the things we trusted in fail, and heart and flesh despair. Then, indeed, our poor human nature is tortured and distracted by the thought of its feebleness. O God! how helpless we are in life's agonies and loneliness if we have only our own pitiful selves to lean upon! "Who is sufficient for these things?"

II. The answer of faith to this human cry: "Our sufficiency is of God." "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." So far as I understand, there are three possible answers to the question—only three. And one of them need not concern us here. It is the answer of the Stoic, the answer of the comparatively few men who have the sternly philosophic mind, who are proudly moral without being religious, who suppress their feelings, and bear the ills of life with an intellectual fortitude that would deem it a weakness to complain. "We are sufficient for all things," says the Stoic, "if we only nerve ourselves to grin and bear them, and quietly yield to what we cannot avoid." But not many of us are Stoics. The second answer is suggested by repeated failures, or perhaps by failure and cowardice together. "Who is sufficient for these

things?" "No one," says the man who has never aimed high, or who has made a few attempts in that direction and speedily wearied of them. You sometimes hear that answer from men and women of the nobler sort who have made determined efforts to maintain their lives on a high moral level, and have been pulled down, driven back, thwarted, saddened, and perhaps soured by repeated discomfiture. "The thing cannot be done," they say. "The forces of the world, the flesh, and the devil are too strong for pure ideals. In the very nature of things human nature must fail in the endeavour to lift itself above human nature. The Christian life is only fit for angels, and we are but men with soiled feet, and without the least symptom of sprouting wings. We cannot overcome the weaknesses inherent to the flesh. We must be what appetite, passion, temper, inheritance, and environment make us. We cannot escape from the force of fashion, from the bindings of habit, and the shapings of the atmosphere and mould in which we find ourselves. Unworldly ideals belong to the region of poetry and the pulpit. They are Utopian and not actual. They might be attained in some imaginary world of saints, but they are impossible in the world in which we happen to be placed. Elevated aims in public life, strict righteousness in business, cleanness in all one's private thoughts, angelic tempers amid all the things that provoke explosions, they are all beautiful, no doubt, but all tall talk and absolutely unreachable." So hundreds of men and women speak to themselves or others;

men and women, in certain cases, who began well, who began nobly, and have slowly let down their wings and given up all thought of ascending. "Who is sufficient for these things?" They answer, "It is out of the question. Man is human, and you must not expect him to be superhuman."

And there is the third answer, given by God to all who trust Him, given by Christ to His disciples, given by St. Paul here, and in many other places: "Our sufficiency is of God"; "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me"; "Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ." That is the answer which saves a man from moral cowardice, which sets him up again after every fall, and makes him always brave enough to renew and continue the struggle.

Never did any man feel more than this Apostle the hardness of the higher endeavour. Never did any man confess more frequently and more humbly the inadequacy of human resources, the inability of the human to carry the battle through to victory. He felt it as painfully as the most tempted and weakest of us all: "When I would do good, evil is present with me"; "O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He fears the battle; he is appalled by the magnitude of it; he is pressed beyond measure; he shakes like a leaf at the thought of his own feebleness. Yet never does his purpose falter; never does he regard the Christian ideal as unattainable. Persistently he presses towards the mark with a bold and confident front, sure that at last he will lay hold of it. He is always crying,

"I cannot, and yet by the grace of God I can." For always, along with the sense of human weakness, he feels that he is compassed about and upheld by a power far mightier than himself. The Almighty is supplementing all that is weak in him, and saving him from himself. The human spirit is not left alone in the unequal conflict. It is girded around and supported by Omnipotence, and much greater than all that is against it. Each day's prayers bring down unseen allies to fight against the visible foes, and divine force which makes the shivering heart firm as rock again. "It is not I, but Christ that dwelleth in me." It is not one man against the world, but that man and God with him. That, verily, is the Christian answer. Let it be yours. Do not yield to the thought that God has called you to do and bear impossible things.

Be it temptation, or sorrow, or thorns in the flesh, whatever it be, you will have strength for the hour and the need. God puts a very giant into the heart of a child when a giant's work has to be done. "Who is sufficient for these things?" Everyone who can say, with Paul, "Our sufficiency is of God."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE IDEALS WHICH FAIL AND NEVER FAIL

"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."—PHIL. iii. 12.

THE Apostle here speaks of his past and his present life under a well-known figure of speech. Before his conversion he was like a man running a race, a race of his own, with his eyes set on a lower goal. And then Christ apprehended him, caught hold of him, turned him round, and set him running towards another goal, and he is pursuing that goal yet, and it is still a long way off. "Not as though I had already attained." In the days when he was a young, proud Pharisee, the rising hope of his party, petted, praised, and flattered for his zeal and cleverness, he had regarded himself as well-nigh faultless. The ideal of Pharisaism was not very exalted and sublime, and if you are content to aim low you soon get abundantly satisfied with yourself. But Christ had come and given him a model which was not so easy to follow. Christ had shown him an ideal which soared mountains above him. He had been pursuing that for years,

and it was still out of his reach. "He caught me up to make me a great preacher and apostle and valiant soldier, to make a saint, perfect with His righteousness, a man all new-made in Him. And I have not caught yet what He caught me for. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after. Yet I still keep the ideal before me, and am ever praying, aspiring, and labouring towards it." And I think that gives us almost the best and truest description of the Christian life, and of every good and noble life which we can find. It is a life which is always disappointed with itself, never in the least degree disposed to boast of what it has been and done, always grieving, rather, that it has not attempted and attained more, and yet never cast down, never ceasing to hope and to believe that all things are possible, and never slacking in the endeavour to reach and grasp the prize of the heavenly calling. "Not as though I had already attained: but I follow after." We have here—

I. The cry of a man who is grieving over an unrealised ideal: "Not as though I had already attained." There runs through all St. Paul's writings a cry like that, a murmur of impatience, a complaint against himself, as if his life had been more than half a failure; as if he had not done what he hoped, and not gained what he sought. In the bright young morning of his conversion, when the vision of Christ had burst upon him in a dream of surpassing loveliness, and made the whole world new, his thoughts had mounted high indeed. He saw himself transformed speedily into

the image of Christ, the chains of sin broken, and the whole of his old life buried and done with. He fancied that he would win a complete victory over himself, and equally swift victories over the world of unbelief. He would draw the Jews, his fellow-countrymen, to Christ; then perhaps he would go conquering everywhere in Gentile fields. The whole future wore the triumphant colours of a brave enthusiasm. Alas! these lofty hopes had been rudely handled and half shattered in the rough experience of life. Everything had fallen short of his expectations. The Jews had stubbornly refused his message; the Gentiles had only sparingly responded to his sweet piping; and he himself had not become the man of his dreams. Some of the old nature had clung to him. The human infirmities and lusts had proved too much at times for the diviner spirit within him, and he had to groan out, "O wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" He was not the man he had purposed to be. He had not accomplished the great things he projected. He was obliged to confess that he was only the least of the Apostles, and less than the least of all saints. The ideal was unrealised. "Not as though I had already attained."

And we are all like that, all of us, at least, who had in early life an earnest purpose and a pure ambition. As we get on in years there comes a sense of moral disappointment. We look back and see the ground strewn with broken ideals. We have found it harder to live a good and noble life than we supposed, and we are conscious of

partial or total failure in some of the best and highest things. It may be that in the lower spheres we have succeeded beyond expectations. Some have acquired wealth and high standing and public honours and the prizes of intellectual power, greater than the most glowing hopes of youth pictured. In these things we may not have been disappointed: the reality has outstripped the dream. But we have all fallen short of our moral and spiritual ideals. We are not the men and women that we saw in the prophetic glass of youth's fair hopes, when the heart was beating with true purpose; we are not the Christian men that we determined to be when Christ caught hold of us, and we began to run the race as if our hearts were on fire and our feet had wings. We were going to do such great things, and rise up as eagles above the flesh and the world. Alas! there have been no eagles' wings; there has only been the toilsome climb of heavy and tired feet, with many a halt and many a downward slip. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." It is always a cumbrous labouring after something far above us, with many a pang of humiliation because the advance has been slow. "Not as though I had attained." I may be pardoned, this once, for making a personal reference. Twenty-five years to-day I preached my first sermon to the people whom I am addressing now. It was from the text "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." I announced the purpose to preach Christ Jesus in all His breadth,

fulness, and beauty, and to hide self behind the divine message and seek no personal ends in exalting His name and glory. I think I spoke modestly then, as became one who was just putting on the harness. And, if one does not boast then, still less likely is he to boast when he is putting it off. He has never anything, then, but a sense of ideals striven for and always unrealised. He is disappointed, not with others, but with himself. For, however much a true man may have reason to complain of others, he always finds far more reason to be dissatisfied with himself. Through all these years there has been a growing impatience with my own work; always there has been the humbling sense of ideals unattained, of things that might have been better done, and failure in the things wherein there seemed to be most success. The hours in which praise has been most lavish have been the hours in which self-censure has been most keen. I have never preached a sermon which has yielded me satisfaction; never spoken in my Master's name without a feeling that I had done Him injustice. I have tried to preach a great, many-sided, all-saving, all-majestic, and all-lovely Christ, and fallen woefully short. I do not know Him myself yet; I only comprehend him through a glass, darkly. Still less have I been able to present His breadth, and height, and depth to you. Twenty-five years, and I am only just beginning to feel my way into the mysteries of His grace and sweetness, and now my preaching, to you at least, is finished, over, and it has to be left, as every

human work must be left, with the cry, "Not that I have already attained"; and that is what we all say, no matter what our strivings have been. Something has been done, a little gained; but more *not done*, and much that might have been better, and all the greater things are still waiting, far beyond us, and always unrealised. "Not as though I were already perfect: but I follow after." And in these words the Apostle reminds us—

II. That in every real Christian life the ideal is not lost or abandoned, it is only deferred. It is always a divine promise that waits to be fulfilled, and cannot fail. "I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus." There is a prophecy in our very failures; there is an assurance of better things in our sharpest disappointments. The very sense of impatience with ourselves is God's word of hope in us. We are dissatisfied with everything that we have done and are, just because His higher things have been revealed to us, and because we feel that they are possible. The groan of discontent is the voice of God's Spirit within us, preparing for the richer song, and the pains which come with the consciousness of imperfection are the growing pains, through which we reach a diviner stature. A good man's dissatisfaction with himself and his life is always the proof and pledge that God has greater things in store than he has ever tasted yet. These things point on to the perfect day. "I follow after." St. Paul never entertains a doubt concerning the end. The ideal will be reached, though it is now very far off. There are wails of

disappointment, the groans of the burdened spirit, and the sigh for the things that have not been attained; but through all that there runs the melody of triumph, strength, and coming victory. He is sure that the carnal mind will die and the spiritual mind become supreme. He is sure that, in the conflict between the body of sin and the indwelling Christ, the victory will incline more and more to the diviner part, until body, soul, and spirit shall be presented blameless before Him, and he shall come into the fulness of the stature of the man Christ Jesus.

And that is the one thing which separates and differentiates the Christian soul from the man of the faithless world. He never lets go the ideal and the belief in its realisation. The worldly man says: "I am just what I have made myself or circumstances have made me, and it is vain to suppose that there can be any great change for the better. I had my dreams and ideals once, but they are gone, done with, dead and buried all along life's track. No use starting off after them again; I found out slowly that they were impossible, and, as a practical man, abandoned them"; but the Christian says, "I follow after,"—*always that.* "Of course," he says, "I am not the man I hoped to be. Many a noble purpose and ideal which I cherished has been defaced and even trodden down in the hard battle of life; but I will not believe that those ideals are dead and buried. I shall see them again, restored to beauty, and I shall reach them too, and grasp them in God's good time. All that I have failed to win

is still held out to me. All the good that I have striven for, and perhaps missed, is still reserved in God's great storehouse, and there is better work before me than I have ever yet accomplished, some of it in this life, and more in the life beyond; and there are clearer visions awaiting me, of all truth, and the face of Jesus Christ, than I have ever yet seen, and there are larger gifts to exercise and wider spheres of service, and more of the thoughts and power of Jesus Christ, my Lord; and life's nobler dreams are not deceptions of the credulous brain, but blessed realities of the living God; and the chances of the sons of God are never exhausted, but are always coming fresh and illimitable, and every promise will be fulfilled beyond man's poor reckoning of it; and by the eternal love and power of God I shall yet be and do all that my best desires have wished and sought. 'I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.'" So speaks everyone who has been touched with the mind of Christ.

And let me remind you and myself that the only sad and painful thing in a Christian life, the one unchristian thing, as we may call it, is just the dropping of the ideal, the lowering of it, the practical abandonment of it, and the dull contenting oneself with the lower things.

You may say it is humiliating to feel that we have not attained, that we have not fulfilled, any one of the hopes with which we commenced the Christian life, that we have fallen short of all our best prayers and purposes. Yes, that is humili-

ating, but that need not suggest discouragement, still less despair. No, there need never be discouragement, with the mercy of God to cover all failure, and the mighty Spirit of the Master to give new starts.

The only mournful and really distressing thing is to *lose the ideal*—to leave it quite behind, to despise and forget it, because we no longer believe in it, to resign ourselves to the thought that Christ has failed to make of us what He promised, and must always fail.

The Lord save us from that, for it is the saddest thing that can come into one's life. The Lord help us to believe always in the divine things which are coming, and must come. The Lord help us, in all those hours when we are most sensible of the unworthy past, and the things badly done, to find heart of grace, and hope again in the unlimited possibilities of His love. And whenever we cry, "Not as though I had already attained," may there always be this cheerier onward cry, "But I follow after."

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